

hi-fi

JANUARY 2005 UK £3.40

WORLD

Ming Da's stunning **MC-7R** valve preamplifier

TUBULAR BELLE



BUDGET AUDIOPHILE SPECIAL

- Affordable Valve Co. VR-70E
- Denon PMA1500R II
- Castle Richmond 3i
- Cyrus 8vs - PSX-R
- Pioneer DV-575
- Mission 780SE
- Spendor S6e

Rega's enchanting **P5** turntable

AUDIO ANALOGUE MAESTRO CD • ECLIPSE A502

JANUARY 2005



WORLD AWARDS 2004: BEST HI-FI GUIDE p87

MARKETPLACE - 100s OF CLASSIFIED BARGAINS

COMPETITION - WIN EXPOSURE'S SUPERB 2010S CD PLAYER!

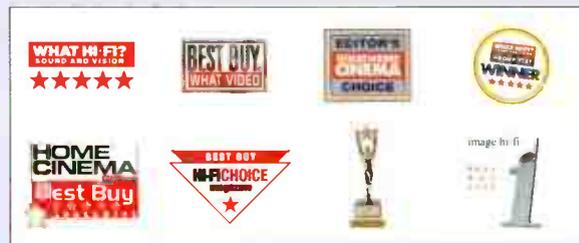


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The new Mordaunt-Short Avant Premiere Plus system is a complete Home Cinema loudspeaker package offering outstanding sonic reproduction from unobtrusive enclosures.

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MORDAUNT-SHORT

World Radio History

welcome

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Any hi-fi designer will tell you that making fine sounding products is easy - the real challenge is doing it down to a price. Although the hype might suggest otherwise, following a few basic principles (good components, proper power supplies, quality materials, etc.) should guarantee excellent results - there's no magic here. Rather, the real genius lies in making 'real world' hi-fi separates sound better than the sum of their parts...

So this month's *Hi-Fi World* looks at affordable esoterica - gear that works better than it has a right to. We've a huge variety of kit, from Rega's sublime P5 turntable to Castle's inspired Richmond 3i loudspeakers, Pioneer's cult DV-575 silver disc spinner to MeiXing' Electronics' bargain MC-7R valve preamplifier - and much more. From p15, our writers have also assembled three quirky but inspired systems, boasting an eclectic range of high performance, low cost items - and they even explain how to get the best from them, too!

Turn to p87 and you'll see our twelve page **World Awards 2004** special. We don't hand out gongs like they're going out of fashion. Instead, we've simply nominated the latest class-leading kit in twelve categories, plus the runners up, and that's it. Each component offers plain old high performance at a low price' - telephone number price tags need not apply. *Hi-Fi World* has always been the affordable audiophile magazine, and I hope January's issue proves this in no uncertain terms!

David Price, editor

testing

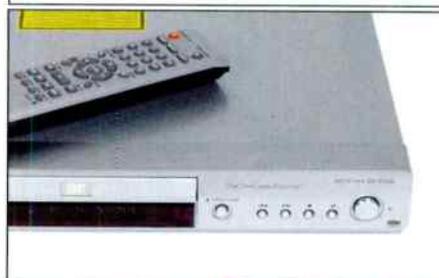
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verdicts



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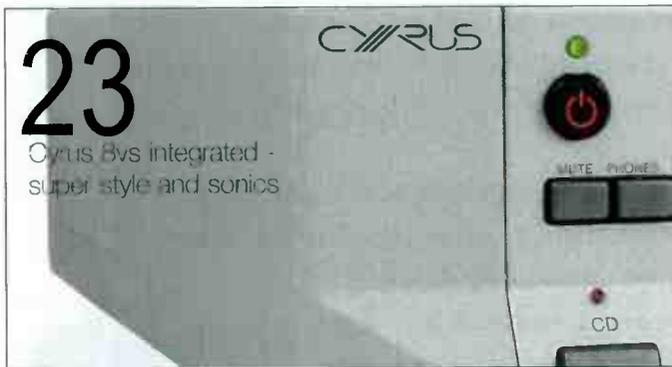
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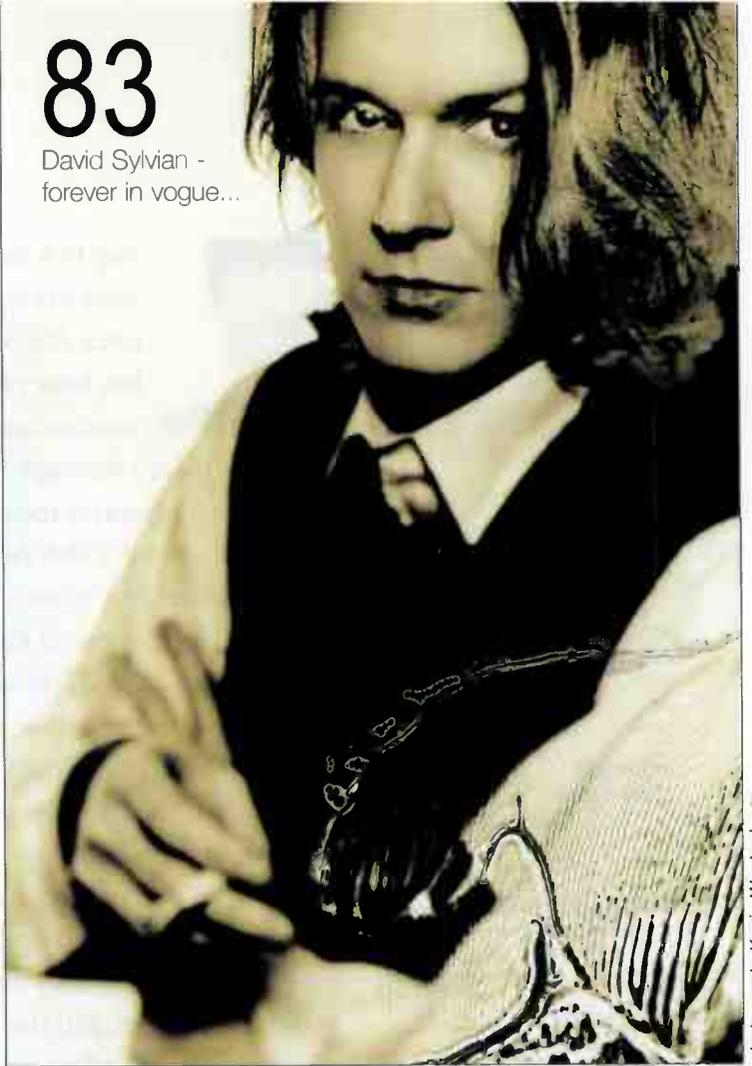
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photograph: Kevin Westenberg

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AFFORDABLE AUDIOPHILE SPECIAL:

REGA P5 II

This sub-£700 turntable offers brilliant musicality, stunning aesthetics and is easy set-up too, says David Price.

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This disarmingly well finished and superbly engineered British bookshelf speaker gets the treatment from Channa Vithana.

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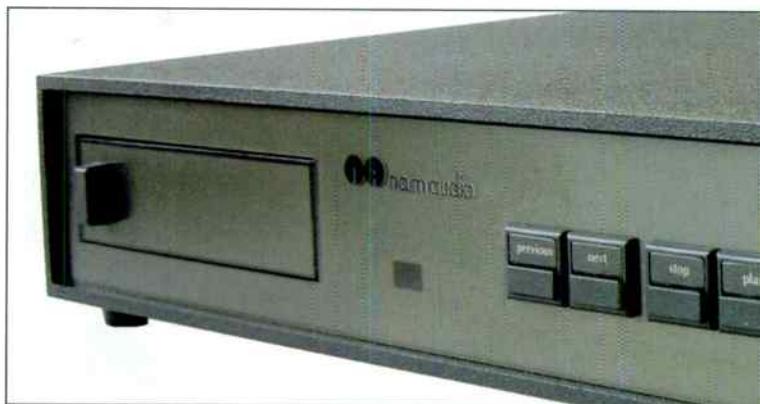
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“Amazing value and massively impressive performance.” *What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision*

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M-AGE

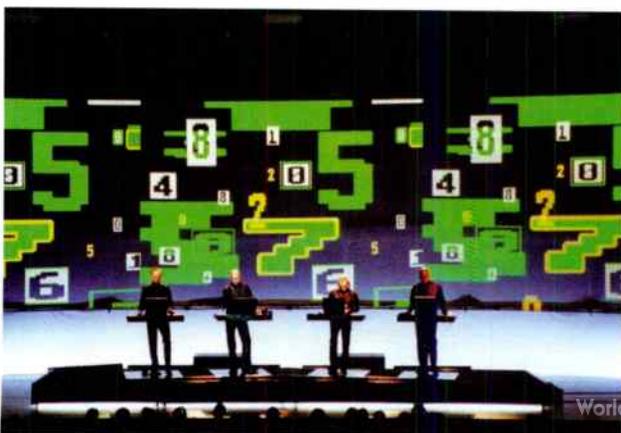
Meridian Audio's stunning looking DSP5200 is the latest addition to its expanding range of DSP-based loudspeakers. It takes the elegant appearance and advanced design of Meridian's flagship DSP8000, and delivers it in a compact package 36 inches tall. The self-contained system combines a 2-way crossover design, three custom drivers, three amplifiers, two multi-bit delta-sigma digital converters, digital crossovers and computers to provide full remote control over bass, treble tilt, time-correct balance, absolute phase, tweeter axis and input. Meridian says the latest technology gives the DSP5200 precise detail with pinpoint imaging and dimensionality in both stereo and surround. Advanced signal processing allows correction of the frequency response for a variety of locations. The curved and tapered cabinet both increases stiffness and improves HF dispersion for a more natural top end. Cabinet construction is of 19 mm thick multi-layer

materials, with proprietary heavy poured resin, and is inherently stiff with superior geometry and damping. The dual bass drivers are 160 mm long-throw composite designs and the cabinet vents, and the tweeter is a 25 mm aluminium-dome, silver-wire design. Each speaker incorporates an electronics panel in the rear of the cabinet, accepting two digital inputs. High resolution double-precision processing and upsampling, coupled with the latest 192 kHz, 24-bit DACs, are used. The three 75W amplifiers themselves are again based on those in the DSP8000, with the latest error-correcting auto-biasing technology. Meridian claims that this digital loudspeaker system outperforms anything of its size. Available in a choice of black or silver high gloss lacquer, satin Santos rosewood, natural satin maple, stained cherry and black ash finishes, the UK recommended retail price is £6,150 per pair. For more information, click on www.meridian-audio.com.



POWER PLAY

One of the most influential groups in the history of modern music, German electronic music pioneers Kraftwerk, have taken delivery of a PMC IB2S-A 5.1 surround loudspeaker system, powered by Bryston PP300 amplification. The new monitor system is installed in their renowned Kling Klang studio in Düsseldorf, Germany, where they are working on post production and mixing of live material from their current World Tour 2004. The decision to use PMC monitors to mix the forthcoming CD album and DVD soundtrack of Tour 2004 was made by Kraftwerk; Ralf Hütter, Florian Schneider, Fritz Hilpert and Henning Schmitz, after an exhaustive series of comparative listening tests. The auditions were said to involve the world's five best known studio monitor brands and was conducted using a wide range of musical genres, including Kraftwerk's recently re-mastered back catalogue and current live material. The band intends to release their 2004 Live CD and DVD in the very near future. For further details on the IB2S-A loudspeaker, contact PMC Ltd. on +44 (0) 870 444 1044 or click on www.pmc-speakers.co.uk.



PRO PLUS

Naim Audio has developed a professional version of the NAP 250 power amplifier called the NAP 250 Pro. The first order of these have recently been delivered to BBC News to aid technical directors improve sound balancing on some of its output. The NAP 250 Pro is equipped with balanced inputs via XLR and Speakon connectors for monitors. Designed by Naim, after consultation with BBC News engineers; the NAP 250 Pro can be used with the type of speaker cables in use in professional studios as well as Naim's own NACA5. The amp boasts 80W RMS continuous into 8ohms, 400VA transient capability and a frequency response of 2Hz to 65kHz (at -3dB). The original NAP250 was launched twenty seven years ago, and soon acquired many fans thanks to its gutsy, fast and engaging sound. Like Naim's flagship NAP 500, the latest NAP 250s use a new circuit design with improved earthing arrangements, built on a very high quality, anti-resonance main audio circuit board. The same 007 transistors that were custom-designed for the NAP 500 each provide up to 80 amps and 350 Watts, negating the need to use parallel pairs of transistors (which always have a negative effect on sound). Additional 007 transistors are used in the fully regulated power supply and a new transformer is used providing the ability to deliver more than 15 Amps and swing a massive 400VA on transients. Naim says the NAP 250 is stable into any load and able to drive a 2-Ohm load for long periods of time. For more information, click on www.naim-uk.com.

FOR POORER, FOR RICHER...

Denon is on a roll right now, introducing impressive products for every man – and his dog. The thrifty will be interested in its DVD-1910 DVI-HDCP DVD player at £229.99, which caters for all video standards including digital video, eschewing SACD & DVD-A in favour of the "highest quality for every type of display". Intriguingly, Denon says the



new hi-res audio formats, "are being totally ignored by general consumers and at this price point, their inclusion is a waste of time and money. The cash instead has gone on stunning video and great sound." This slim, compact machine offers instead DVI digital video, giving

superlative pictures on an HDMI or DVI capable display. For those without DVI, the twin high-performance video DACs and Faroujda Progressive Scan are claimed to deliver a stunning picture via the component output. Still, the 24/192 audio DACs give a wide dynamic range and the audio circuit design is based on technology from Denon hi-fi, for good results from CD. Those at the other end of the income scale might be interested in the company's new £4,000 AVC-A1XV 'behemoth' AV receiver – claimed to be "the largest, heaviest, most powerful, most flexible and undoubtedly the best AV receiver ever made", no less! Touted as a "complete CEDIA install in one-box, featuring 16-channels of output capability and 10 fully assignable discrete amplifiers, the AVC-A1XV is the world's first AV receiver capable of providing multi-zone 5.1 system capability". Its 10x170W RMS gives one full 9.1-channel surround sound system in a single room, two discrete 5.1-channel systems in different rooms, a 7.1-channel system in the main zone, a 2.1-channel system in a 2nd room and a mono system in a 3rd room! There's an audiophile-oriented 'bi-amp' mode, with two amplifiers used for each front, left, right and centre speakers for a full 5-channel system, delivering maximum power and performance. Factor in a litany of features including full HDMI V1.1 and DVI switching and routing, HDTV Switching, three HDMI inputs, a DVI in and out, two Firewire Inputs and front panel PC setup - and this is versatile tool. For more information, click on www.denon.co.uk.

QUICK-WIRE

IXOS's new XFA09 is an affordable RCA-to-RCA audio interconnect for just £19.95 per metre. It's said to offer more transparency, detail and smoothness over standard bundled interconnects, thanks to its high grade PC OFC conductors and gold plated metal RCA plugs. For details, call 01844 219 012 or click on www.ixoscable.com.



GOING MOBILE

Monster has announced the launch of iCarPlay Wireless Plus, a £79 Apple-specific accessory that allows iPod users to play iTunes wirelessly through virtually any FM station on their car radio while simultaneously charging their iPod. "The Apple iPod is an incredibly popular product and Monster has again made it more convenient for these tech-savvy enthusiasts to listen to their tunes wherever they go," says Monster's Noel Lee. "Why should music fans fumble with CDs when they can play their iPods in the car on just about any FM radio station? Now they can do that and keep their iPods charged at the same time. The iCarPlay Wireless Plus includes digital FM tuning, programmable presets and fast charging for clear iPod stereo sound wherever they go." iCarPlay Wireless Plus can be tuned to almost any clear FM station, so the music lover has full FM tuning flexibility in getting the best possible sound. Connecting is easy - simply tune the car stereo to any clear FM station, tune iCarPlay Wireless Plus to the same station, hit play on the iPod, and that's it. The presets can be changed any time a clearer station is desired. For added flexibility and convenience while listening to the iPod, Monster Smart Digital Charging technology rapidly recharges the connected iPod, and then switches to a trickle charge to optimise performance. For details, click on www.MonsterCable.com.



ARCAM ADVANCE

Following the success of the superb £1,300 DiVA AVR300 7.1 channel home cinema and music receiver, Arcam has launched a more affordable sub-£1,000 version in the shape of the DiVA AVR250. Said to be a perfect partner to Arcam's highly successful DV79 / DV78 DVD players, it boasts state-of-the-art circuitry with a new Crystal CS49400 master DSP (with 24-bit and 32-bit processing; the audio DACs), while the ADCs and volume controls are all 24 bit devices from Wolfson. Support is included for all current audio decoding, including DTS 96/24, Dolby Digital EX, Dolby Pro Logic IIx and more. Video supports both component, RGB and S-video, and includes upconversion from composite or S-video to component or RGB to help minimise the number of cable runs to a display. Three component RGB video inputs are available, all with sufficient bandwidth for HDTV. A programmable master audio delay of up to 220 milliseconds permits use of digital displays without loss of lip sync. A large toroidal power transformer and seven identical low distortion power amplifiers are used, and there's a direct signal path for both stereo signals and the 7.1 multi-channel input. Power output is quoted as 100 Watts per channel into 4 or 8 ohms (two channels driven), 75 Watts per channel with all seven channels driven. An independent second zone, with stereo line level audio and composite video, is supported. Two-way RS232 control is built in as standard; which also enables system software updates. The £999.90 AVR250 is available in silver or black finishes and is surprisingly compact at 430x145x433mm. See: <http://arcam.co.uk>



THE CONCEPT

DALI's Concept 10 is a full-range three-way, floor-standing speaker equally suited for the subtle reproduction of classical music with realistic dynamics as well as hard rock at engaging sound pressure levels. Available in cherry or light oak finishes with a gunmetal-grey baffle optically matching the chassis/frames of the drivers, the three way bass reflex full-range speaker features a 1" soft dome tweeter with large magnet, flexible voice coil braids and magnetic oil, a 6.5" midrange with 1" voice coil and powerful dual-magnet motor and 2 x 10" ventilated dual-magnet woofers w. air-dried lightweight pulp cones. Sensitivity is claimed to be a healthy 91 dB, while the weight is quoted at a back straining 34kg each. Price is said to under £700 per pair. Click on www.dali.dk.

WALK THIS WAY

Sony has launched two portable digital music players which do not first require MP3s to be transcoded into Sony's own ATRAC3plus format before playback. The new Network Walkman models, the NW-E95 and NW-E99, "will allow consumers the freedom to transfer ATRAC3plus and MP3 files". They feature 512MB and 1GB respectively, offering storage of up to 23 CDs on the NW-E95, and up to 46 CD's on the NW-E99 in Sony's ATRAC3plus compression format. They feature 70 hour battery life, and weigh 40g. Other models include the NW-E55 and NW-E75, and owners of these are now able to download software from the Internet which enables them to play MP3 tracks directly too: Sony's new digital music site 'CONNECT' offers over 300,000 downloadable unique tracks from both major and independent labels from 79p per ATRAC3-encoded song - see www.connect-europe.com.



see p76 OBITUARY:

JOHN PEEL (1939- 2004)

John Peel (John Robert Parker Ravenscroft) OBE, sadly died from a heart attack whilst on a working holiday in Peru. He was more than a DJ or a broadcaster, but an institution. He'd been with BBC Radio One since its inception in 1967, and prior to this had been a DJ in the US during the time of Beatle-mania, and latterly on Radio London where he'd presented his ground-breaking 'Perfume Garden' programme. It's probably fair to say that Liverpool born John - 'Peelie' to his adoring listeners - was responsible for breaking more fresh new talent than any other British broadcaster. Such was his championing of acts as diverse as David Bowie, Marc Bolan (T.Rex), The Sex Pistols, The Undertones, Black Uhuru, Public Enemy and The Smiths that he impacted not just the British, but the world's, popular music scene. He will be missed.

next issue

February's Hi-Fi World takes an in-depth look at the weird and wonderful world of classic hi-fi. We audition stunning stuff from the sixties, seventies and eighties, including Garrard 301, Sansui XP-99 and Linn LP12 turntables, Leak Stereo 20, Marantz MA5 and Naim NAP250 amplification, Quad ESL59 and Linn Sara (active) loudspeakers - and much, much more. We try a new Naim ARO tonearm on the latest Michell Orbe turntable, put a rebuilt Quad 303 power amp against the new 909 and pit Sony's original CDP101 CD player against its flagship CDP-XA9000ES. If you're a fan of classic hi-fi, then the next Hi-Fi World is unmissable...

Walrus

11 New Quebec St, London W1



This ad features a few new products we're excited about, as well as a couple of old favourites (which we're still excited by even after all this time!) From top right, going anticlockwise, first off are the Anthony Gallo Reference 3 loudspeakers (£2400/pr). You can't tell from the picture, but these are actually very compact (about 3 feet tall) but have the most amazing bass extension and a very open sound. Next, the brand new Musical Fidelity A5 series amplifier (250W/ch) and CD player, at £1499 each, are superb value. They are designed to be better, and cost less, than the popular 308 series, and don't even feel embarrassed in the company of the famous Nuvista and Trivista series. The CD even features a valve output stage, just like the late lamented Trivista DAC! The Duevel Bella Lunas (£3160 to £4160/pr dependent on finish) need no introduction. This superb Omni design, featured at the recent Heathrow Show, should be on everyone's shortlist. Origin Live's new Sovereign turntable (£3850 plus arm) sets new, even higher standards for this already envied manufacturer whose decks already receive huge acclaim from the press. Next up is something we thought we'd never see - a valve / transistor hybrid power amp from Tom Evans, famous for their Groove phono stage and Vibe preamp. The Linear A (£3999) is a truly innovative design which draws on the strengths of both technologies to give transistor speed and control with valve naturalness and texture, another milestone for Tom! Many people will still remember the success we had with the Magneplanar MG 1.6 speakers at the show. These flat non-electrostatic panels with ribbon tweeters produce the most amazingly believable soundstage, all for the direct import no-middleman price of £1500/pr. The new Duevel Shuttle-Disk rechargeable battery CD player (also £1500) is on permanent demo - bring your own CDs and be pleasantly surprised! Lastly, we had to squeeze it in, what we regard as probably the finest all round (pardon the pun) turntable in the world, the Brinkmann LaGrange with the Brinkmann 10.5 tonearm (£8395 in total), a truly staggering combination.



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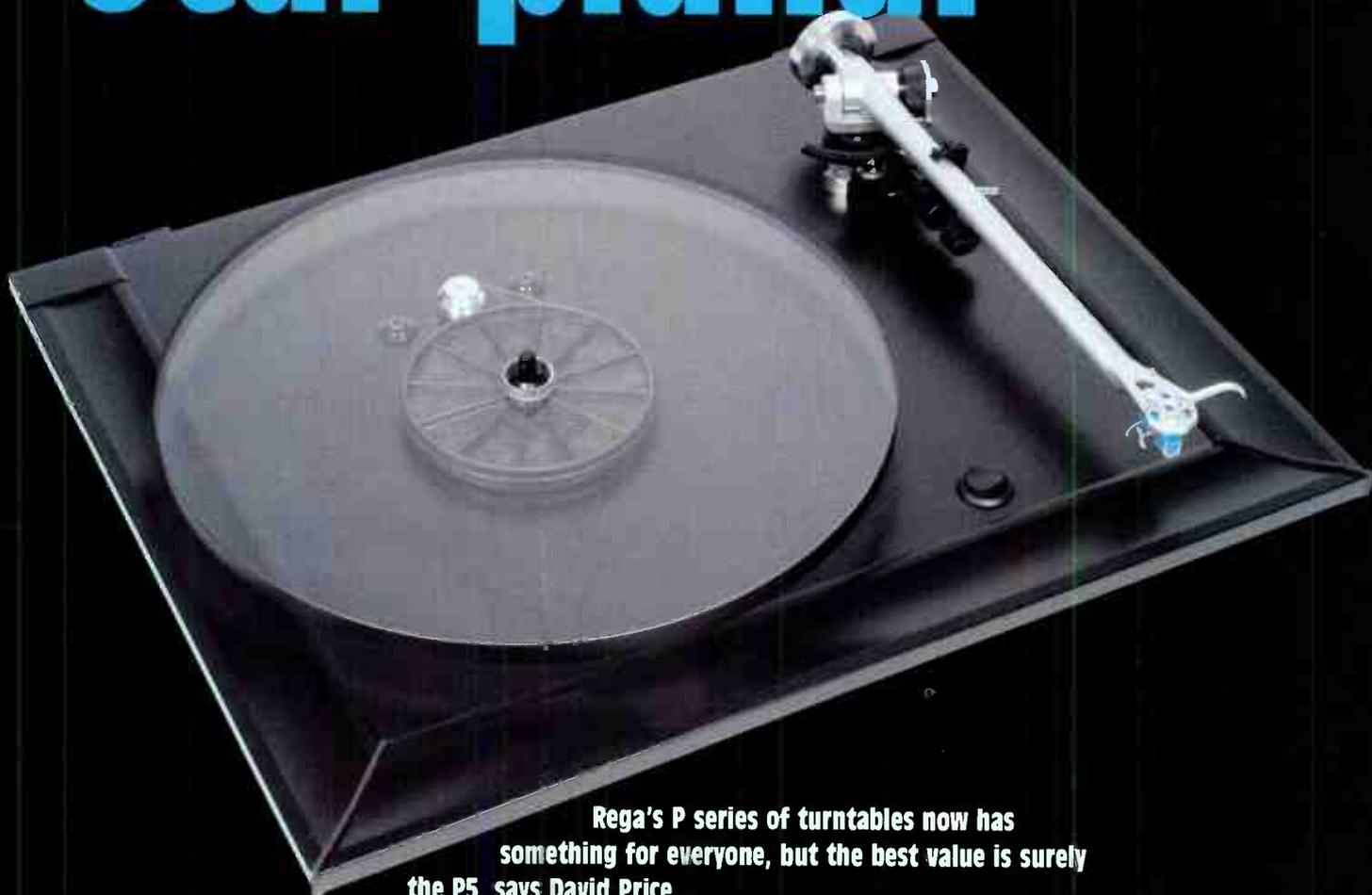
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World Radio History

star planar



Rega's P series of turntables now has something for everyone, but the best value is surely the P5, says David Price...

Not to put too fine a point on it, Rega wrote the rule book of high performance, low cost turntables. It was the wilfully eccentric Planet which started it, some thirty years ago. This curious podule-plattered confection marked the company out as distinctive, if nothing else. But behind the madcap record support was some deadly serious precision engineering. Whilst all its other rivals, especially those from Thorens and Dual, wielded independently sprung subchassis, the Planet was – in essence – a simple piece of 'wood'. Now, this may sound disparaging, but it is not meant to. The art of design, in hi-fi as in everything else, is that of intelligent use of resources and materials at any given price point. By shaving costs through the omission of any suspension system, Rega was able to offer a high class (Philips/Impex 24v AC synchronous) motor, bearing and pickup arm - a formula

that Rega has not deviated from to this day.

Here, we see Rega's £698 mid-price product, a sector which allows the company to spend a little more money on the bare essentials than it can on the brilliant, class leading P3. Of course, there are still no springs in sight (bias compensation inside the tonearm notwithstanding), so you'll have to factor in a serious quality support as part of your budget. What you do get, however, is the RB700 tonearm, which is essentially a better toleranced and specified RB300, complete with a lick of silver paint and fancy cable. (This causes no small degree of wry amusement on my part, as I recall speaking to Rega some ten years back about the possibility of them doing this, and they were dismissive in the extreme!).

The other thing that's upgraded from the P3 is the plinth – or rather, the surround. While the cheaper deck follows the original Rega

template of fibreboard plinth sitting on 'vibration absorbing' (ha!) feet, the P5 is the entry-level model in the range with a form of serious decoupling – the inner 'low mass micro fibre' (i.e. an MDF variant) plinth (450x130x360mm) sits on a deliciously finished tubular aluminium surround. This was first seen on the earlier P25 (albeit in wood form), and is now used in all higher end Regas. Some readers may be sceptical about how much benefit this brings, but suffice to say that the subjective results are certainly positive (more of which later). The surround is offered in silver satin or black satin finishes.

In 1978, Rega replaced the Planet with the Planar 2 and 3. Aside from a change of paint colour (from white to black), the principal difference was the substitution of its wacky podular platter for a thick glass disc (on the 2 it was topped by rubber matting, on the 3 it got thick felt). The P5 follows this convention, as per so many



Rega before it, with a 15mm hand crafted floated plate glass platter topped by a thin Linn LP12-style felt mat (the chunky Planar 3 item is no more). Rega says this provides stability and assists in the isolation of record information against other sounds and also provides excellent speed stability; they are not wrong.

say, this is the real deal; nothing else looks (and feels) classier.

The other brilliant thing is its simplicity – to use, to unpack, to set-up. Compared to the P5, other decks seem mind-numbingly tedious to assemble, fettle and keep work. As I always hand cue then it's simply a case of switching on and dropping

superb cover of Leonard Cohen's 'First We Take Manhattan', and the P5 enthralled with its speed and directness. Its midband is startlingly well articulated – very much like the old Linn Kan loudspeaker, it's so convincing in this area that its shortcomings anywhere else simply don't matter – you don't notice

them. It's the sense of 'connectedness' you get that impresses most – my Quad 989s felt like a giant pair of Stax

"I set up the Rega P5 in my £10,000 reference system – if it could deliver the goods here, then I'd have no further questions, your honour..."

Finally, the motor: said to be 'an improved P25 anti-vibration' design, its (necessarily, for the P3) cheap and cheerful motor pulley is now machined aluminium (hurrah!) and there's a choice of power supplies – the direct 24v for the supplied 'wall wart' or a DIN socket for the new Rega TT PSU optional upgrade power supply for the P5 turntable. This can only be used with the P5 and P7 turntables (and not with any other Rega or non-Rega turntable). It's a crystal-locked low distortion sine wave generator design (as used in the P9), which using an efficient drive amplifier fed from stabilised DC power supply, generates a 24Volt AC balanced signal of less than 0.05% distortion (claimed). This isolates the motor from the vagaries of this country's wonderful AC mains supply, and also has the benefit of providing switched 33/45 RPM operation.

Considering the relatively modest price premium over the already class-leading P3, the P5 offers a lot for the money, addressing all the critical 'limiting factors' of its cheaper brother (i.e. arm, plinth, motor), while leaving the fancy stuff (ceramic oxide powder platter, twin drive belts) for its P7 sibling at nearly twice the price. For this reason, I really think it's a great little package – and cracking value. It's also beautifully built – no matter what Pro-ject fans

('not literally', as Alan Partridge would say, 'that would be hideous') the stylus into the groove. It's so simple that it makes using any CD player seem needlessly complex and fussy (Patrick Cleasby would doubtless at this point invoke the Mac vs. PC paradigm...). The other nice thing is that Rega offer their own range of rather fine cartridges, with three-point mountings, which fit the P5 hand in glove. The Super Elys [see BOX] came fitted to the review sample, although I did try others – more of which later.

SOUND QUALITY

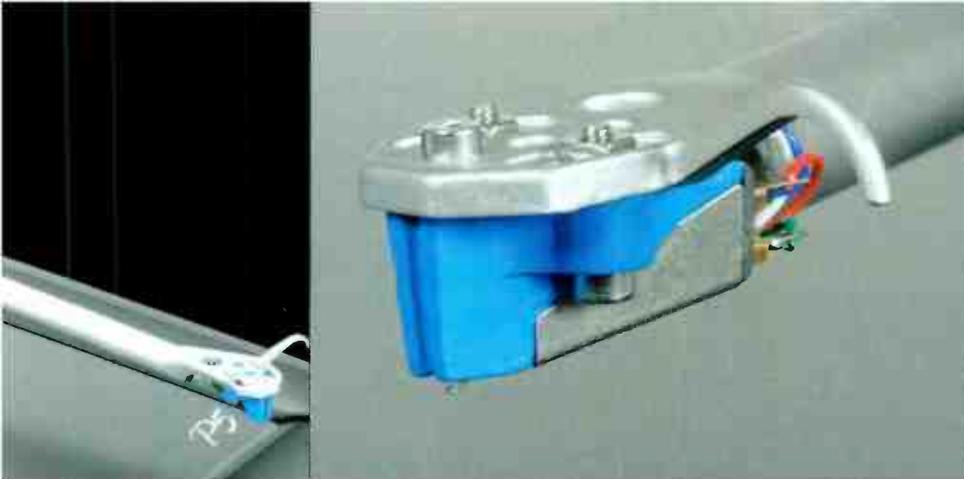
In for a penny, in for a pound. I set up the Rega P5 in my £10,000 reference system (see BOX) – if it could deliver the goods here, then I'd have no further questions, your honour. And deliver it did, in spades. First and foremost, with the Rega Super Elys fitted, this is not by any stretch of the imagination a neutral performer – but is none the worse for it! Here's one of the most musical analogue disc spinners at or anywhere near the price – it has real *joie de vivre*, an incredible sense of get-up-and-go that instantly appeals and endears. It's brilliantly fast, detailed, engaging, energetic and bracing – no matter what music you feed it.

I started with Jennifer Warnes'

electrostatic headphones, Jennifer's voice coming right out at me with tremendous conviction. In fact, left-to-right imaging is stunning, no less. The location of all the elements within the mix is as good as I've heard from practically any turntable at any price; it's just so strong, so positive, so focused.

Next most apparent was the pace and timing; here it again reminded me of what I love so much about 'flat earth' eighties hi-fi – the P5 just got right into the groove and bounced along at a blistering pace. It made this big rock production sound utterly enthralling. It's also great dynamically too – not the best in absolute terms of course, but the 'microdynamics' were so confidently carried that I just couldn't stop listening. You get an almost mastertape-like sense of 'being there', of witnessing a musical event first hand, rather than having it described to you some time after the fact. Put pithily, the Rega really rocks.

A move to Julie Tzuke's 'Welcome to the Cruise', a far softer, more obviously 'analogue' sounding LP, proved the Rega's mettle. Many turntables turn this into a sort of 'sound soup', a thick mess of noise with no discernable reason or rhyme. Timing is critical to convey this classic track with the skill it deserves, and the Rega jumped into



P5 vs. TECNODEC

It's important to remember that, with arm, the Michell TecnoDec is a bit more expensive than the P5, and it sounds it too. The Michell is more refined, more rounded, more neutral, more self-effacing, more dispassionate and controlled. The obverse is that the Rega P5 sounds more 'locked in', it's more engaging and the more musical of the two, bringing a wide-eyed naivety to proceedings. It jumps into the groove of whatever it's asked to play with heady abandon – and is all the more charming for it. However, the TecnoDec takes time to get it right, and there's superior scale, more extended bass, airier treble and a general sense of perspective. In a nutshell, the Michell sounds like you're watching a concert from the balcony, the Rega from the stalls – your choice!

it with zeal. Unperturbed by the murky production values, it scythed through the scunge to reveal a grippingly emotional performance, and really looked into the texture of her voice and all those classic seventies keyboard, drum and bass guitar sounds.

Putting on a more neutral disc in the shape of Joan Armatrading's 'Me, Myself, I' confirmed my suspicions. The P5 is not blessed with a surplus of bass. Just like the P3, it takes one look at the lowest octave and says, 'I'm not bothering', preferring instead to devote all its efforts to the middle and upper bass frequencies, where it is superbly lithe, taut, tuneful and supple. This is down largely to the Rega's fine speed stability, which is a step-change above the P3 and not far behind, say, a cooking Michell GyroDec with the excellent TT PSU. Without, the P5 falls back quite a way, and I for one wouldn't want to live without it.

Cue up some classic BlueNote jazz (Lonnie Smith's 'Think' from 1969) and this comes into sharp relief, it's not super neutral or brilliantly dynamic in absolute terms – it doesn't have the scale of Michell's TecnoDec – but does a first class job of the intricate details, showing precisely how strong a snare is struck or a bass guitar string is hit.

The worst aspect of this

combination was tonality. A I Rega stuff sounds just a little dry (except that classic Supex-derived R100 cartridge from the seventies), and the P5 is no exception – especially with the Super Elys. I substituted an Ortofon Kontrapunkt B and 'hey presto', we had warmth, richness and tonal colour. In essence, the P5 is on the dry side of neutral and the Super Elys is tonally on the dry side, period. Although the pair are a brilliant synergistic match in terms of rhythms and midband detailing and image location, it's a tad 'barren' to these decadent ears now used to Koetsu Rosewoods. Even a Goldring 1042 would give it a welcome injection of bass, body and bloom, but then you'd lose its sublimely energetic midband. Your call!

CONCLUSION

At just £698, this is an audiophile bargain of sublime proportions. What I love about the Rega P5 is that the stock package is superb, and yet it's so tuneable. The first thing you must invest in is a decent support, and then it's time for the TT PSU – with these two in the bag, you'll have a deck that's good enough to bring a smile to your face with ten grand's worth of ancillaries – I kid thee not. It's a very capable performer with true character, and simply makes any piece of plastic you place upon it sing. And then it's even good enough to partner with a cartridge costing more than its own purchase price. Affordable esoterica, by any other name.

VERDICT ●●●●● £

Wonderfully engaging and musical sound allied to exquisite styling and finish makes this impossible to argue with – a classic.

REGA P5 £698

REGA SUPER ELYS £150

Rega Research

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REGA SUPER ELYS

This £150 moving magnet can trace its lineage back to the 1983 RB100, which replaced the Supex SD100E-derived R100. The RB100 cost £37, the Super Elys a lot more, but it's been substantially refined. Its three point mounting makes it ideal for the Rega tonearm, assuring perfect geometry, VTA and a brilliant mate to the headshell – three variables that can spoil vinyl sound. It uses a high quality elliptical stylus, and sounds very good for the price, but I can't help feeling this is great cartridge in search of a great diamond tip (such as that in Rega's £275 Exact). There's always a touch of sibilance and zing to the treble that you simply don't get from the £120 Goldring 1042. However, it does whip the Goldring in the pace and dynamics stakes – this is an immensely charismatic performer. If you can forgive it its light, bright, spry tonality (and rather high surface noise levels) you're rewarded with striking attack transients, truly special left-to-right stereo image precision and firecracker dynamics. If you're after a dose of 'vinyl Viagra' then this is about as close as it gets – it's an extremely characterful cartridge in the way Linn's K9 was, but much better.

REGA TUNING TIPS

- always remove the dustcover; it wrecks the sound
- position it on a level surface, ideally a wall table
- go gently with the tonearm bias adjustment
- Audiophile Furniture's BASE platforms raise the game to another level
- leave the platter spinning throughout the listening; repeated switching on and off will stretch the belt
- periodically clean the belt, spindle and inner platter with isopropyl alcohol and a cotton bud

REFERENCE SYSTEM

Michell GyroDec/ SME IV/ Koetsu Red turntable
Musical Fidelity kW500 integrated
Quad 989 loudspeakers
Townshend Maximum supertweeters
REL Strata subwoofer



There may be better value propositions around to upgrade your system but if there is I haven't heard them...A fantastic product then from Origin Live and this particular audiophiles dream review tool."

TNT AUDIO MAGAZINE

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HI FI WORLD

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STEREO TIMES

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DCS Elgar Plus, Purcell, Verdi, Verona. Fully current spec including firewire 05/01 certified except Verona (01/04). Four box CD playing solution	£16000	£24000
Nagra PLP pre-amplifier. Looks good	£4000	£7500
Clearaudio TQ1 Master Reference tonearm - massive acrylic linear tracking thing - unusual opportunity - spotless and as new but no box. Major mental health problem forces sale.	£1900	£3660
Martin Music Systems VSM Millennium loudspeaker. Obscure here, popular there - unusual US design with cult following - includes BAM bass module.	£2500	\$9000
Living Voice Avatar 2 - European Maple - scrumptious.	£2000	£2700
Living Voice OBX-R Mk 1. Even more scrumptious.	£2600	£4000
Alola PST 11.011 Hi-end 2 box line pre-amp - spotless - boxed.	£1500	£2800
Art Audio Vinyl One, MM/MC valve phono stage. Very good. New!	£1300	£1900
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this month's supertest features three affordable audiophile systems. Our scribes were briefed to assemble a group of components that provide outstanding sound per pound. It was a case of anything goes – any source, any format, any vintage – and they came up with three very different answers...

the vinyl cut

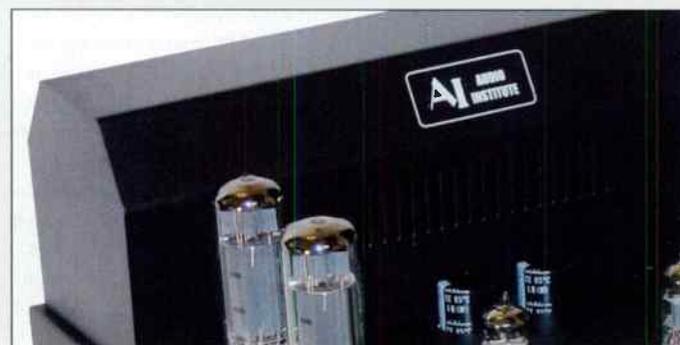
The first of our three reviewer's systems sees Stewart Wennen compile a most characterful vinyl and valve combo, using combining the weird with the wonderful. No departure for him then...

Prepared to be stunned at my choice of components! The bits of kit I have chosen are not expensive by modern standards, but they work very well together indeed - with an obvious synergy in evidence right from the word 'go'. Now, whereas my esteemed colleagues have gone for an odd hotch-potch of begged-and-borrowed eighties retro (Channa) and cool twenty first century lifestyle chic (Dominic), I've opted for an altogether more sensible shoes approach – not! It mixes classic vinyl with brand new, ermm, thermionic tube technology – with the accent on affordable. You can take your fancy multi-digit price tags and shove them up your gold plated phono socketry – my hi-fi system keeps prices cut to the bone, and pushes performance to the max!

My choice of source component was something I have used for a great number of years with real

success - a Townshend Rock turntable. Max Townshend in conjunction with the Cranfield Institute designed the Rock, which was light years ahead of most of the record players that were available in the mid seventies. It subsequently acquired the reputation of sounding just like a Compact Disc player – but I reckon that nothing could be further from the truth. Although rather expensive at the time, these record decks can be acquired for as little as £200 now - an absolute bargain as a budget turntable can cost as much as £1,000 these days.

Although my well used example had a seized main bearing, this was easily released with the aid of the ever-helpful Max, who sent me some detailed instructions, and they worked very well. This is demonstrated by spinning the platter and watching it spin and spin and spin. Fortunately the Impex motor seemed okay, so a replacement wasn't needed. If you have a Rock



with a defective motor these are available along with most of the parts for the turntable from www.townshendaudio.com. I replaced the belt as a matter of course as the old one seemed very tired.

As there was no damping trough with the turntable, and they are sadly no longer available, I decided to replace the original pick up arm with a Roksan Nima unipivot. This arm is a stunning piece of kit at the price and is built in the UK. Cartridge choice was relatively simple as I chose a



Goldring 1006, primarily because it performs very well and when the upgrade bug strikes then you just replace the stylus with a 1042 type for superb MM sound. This upgrade is one of the simplest to achieve as the vertical tracking force does not need any tweaking - just slot the new stylus in and listen to the music!

For my phono stage, I looked no further than Mr. Graham Slee, who is a specialist engineer who produces some of the best RIAA equalisation stages in the world. So the choice of the Gram Amp 2 was an obvious

It is the VR-70E, which is amongst the best affordable valve amplifiers around - distortion is less than 1% with 20W RMS at the output terminals (quoted). It displays up to 90dB signal to noise ratio and uses two EL34 output tubes with 6F2 preamplifier stages. Pricing is extraordinarily keen - at just £400 it's almost a steal, especially as this amplifier is one of the most unusual integrated amplifiers I have ever seen. The VR-70 sports just one pair of signal inputs! Don't worry though - if you really must have more than one input then the manufacturer will supply a switching unit for approximately £30. Fit and finish is very good although it does not look as good as some of more esoteric amplification. This is fair enough, as you won't buy an oil painting at this price, and its performance is spectacular for the money; loads of extension in the bass register with that legendary creamy rich midrange to treble that good valve amplifiers seem able to project. And unlike many sub-£2,000 tube designs, it doesn't use tragically poor output transformers - these guys obviously do know what they're doing,...

On to the loudspeakers next. I elected to use a pair of Acoustic Energy Aegis Evolution Threes. As I was using tube amplification, these had to be very efficient, and their specification was not disappointing, as the Aegis Threes have a claimed efficiency of 91dB for 1W of input power. Most modern boxes are

have cones fabricated from pressed aluminium, a material which has the advantage of having low mass and it can also be conveniently used as a heatsink. The drivers in this cabinet are all shielded, so they can be used in close proximity to CRT televisions or monitors. Finally, high frequencies are taken care of by a 25mm silk dome tweeter unit, which also uses Ferrofluid in the magnet gap. This fluid not only damps the drive unit but also acts as a centring agent and a heatsink. Finish of the Aegis Three loudspeakers is very good with correctly matched veneer and a choice of veneers for the customer to choose from.

SOUND QUALITY

From the first note of John Williams' Bach concertos, this system displayed a rather special quality. The acoustic of the recording venue was superbly well described within the stereo image. JW's breathing and fretwork were explicitly conveyed, complete with an extremely even tonal balance, which might surprise some folk considering the system's all-analogue orientation. This record is usually a dead giveaway, as it shows incorrect timing structure and phase lag with poorly designed electronics, but my system passed this initial test with flying colours. Delicacy and textural integrity are vitally important during vinyl transcription, and this combination had it all.

Wilson Pickett is a stunning vocalist and his album, 'Don't Knock

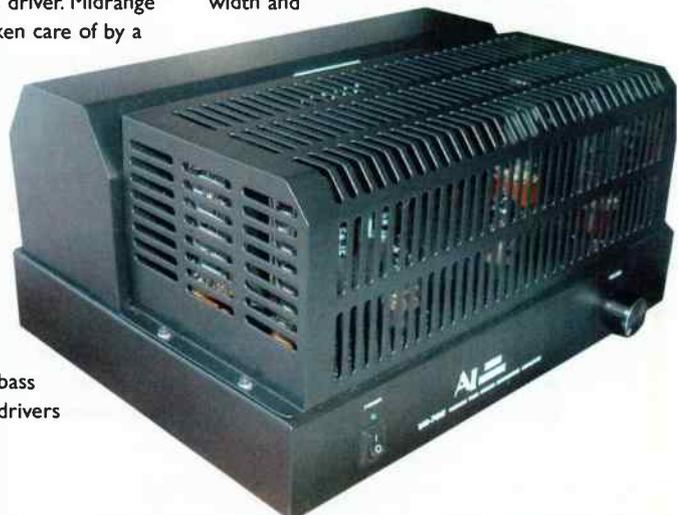
“delicacy and textural integrity are vitally important during vinyl transcription, and this combination had it all...”

one. His attention to detail is legendary. If a resistor varies in value the offending component is removed, and then the correct value component is inserted into the circuitry. This obsessive character is good for the customer, and means that all of his products are extremely fine value for money. Although the case is not the most attractive in the world, this RIAA certainly delivers the goods. The cost of a Gram Amp 2 is less than one hundred of our English Pounds! His website is www.gspaudio.co.uk and his complete range is available to browse around, so do take a look.

Now for my *piece de resistance* - the amplifier I chose was from The Affordable Valve Amplifier Company,

relatively inefficient, but the dual ports on this model help with the overall efficiency and help to extend the bass response beyond what I would have thought possible from a single 160mm bass driver. Midrange frequencies are taken care of by a 120mm-drive unit which utilises a cast aluminium chassis that is acoustically inert and the chosen material does not dilute the magnetic flux away from the voice coil as steel tends to do. Both bass and the midrange drivers

My Love', is regarded by Northern Soul collectors as the pinnacle of his career, with his almost painful delivery, and this treasured piece of vinyl was reproduced with depth and width and



CONTACTS:

Townshend Electronics	020 8979 2155
Roksan/ Ortofon (Henley Designs)	0123 551166
Affordable Valve Company	01634 268662
Graham Slee Audio (HiAudio)	01443 231458
Acoustic Energy	01285 654432

all the spatial clues allied to an ultra smooth treble to midrange balance. This album contains string sections as well as the usual mix of electric instruments allied to very good production values – after all, the producers were Brad Shapiro and Dave Crawford, whose legendary skills are showcased by the rich, warm and expansive soundstage. The Godfather of Soul was on next with 'Get Up Offa That Thing!' a seminal funk track. Bootsie Collins bass was delivered with extremely vibrant playing. The horn section and second vocals rang out in my living room with accuracy and speed. Width of the stereo image was as good as my ATC studio monitors!

A complete change of style next, as Gershwin's 'Rhapsody in Blue' was placed on the turntable and I settled down on my sofa for the duration of this piece. Spatial accuracy was the order of the day as Bernstein played the introduction. First and second strings were correctly displayed with the piano slightly left of centre with the rest of the orchestra behind them. What a wonderful sound! Recorded in a large venue this system has the ability to portray big soundstages with power and delicacy. As for the bass, I could feel the timpani smashing my kidneys to a pulp with the piano carrying the voice of the orchestra. Here was a very, very good transcription of this recording, which left me emotionally drained!

Radio was treated with the same delicacy and strength, especially Radio 4, which has some of the finest broadcasters in the world. As does Smooth FM - especially on Sunday afternoon with the weekly dose of soul music delivered by Richard Searling [steady on Stewart, you're sounding like 'Smashy and Nicey', great mate - Ed.] All in all this is an exceptionally well balanced system, despite being rather unusual with its choice of components - as they're all considered to be 'budget' by those with more money than sense (which is most folk, these days). Every time I lit the system up, I duly switched it off a couple of hours later with a big grin on my face. It's an easy system to listen to, without the weedy bass of many so-called high-end components – what you get is an

amazingly full bodied sound all for less than the price of a shabby second-hand car.

TWEAKING

Firstly the loudspeakers. My house was built in 1864, so the floor is of the suspended type which exhibits a disturbing bounce that precludes the stand mounting of hi-fi components, but the solution is relatively simple - loudspeakers exhibit a tighter bass delivery when mounted atop paving slabs, just don't forget to use a spirit level to achieve true vertical attitude so they can perform as the design engineer intended. Positioning of loudspeakers is a very involved subject and I don't have enough space to do it justice, but if your loudspeakers are not toed in then try this, as it may well work for your listening room – it does for me.

Another critical point for those of the analogue persuasion is turntable support – this really is vitally important even with excellent decks like the Rock. In every instance, I'd recommend a turntable stand fixed to the wall (i.e. a shelf). Enabling the record deck to be effectively removed from the structural vibration loop has a variety of advantages, the main one being cleaner bass and midband. As my turntable stand is a home built type, and cost less than £30 to assemble, it was finished to suit my décor! I generally use marine ply support platforms but I recently changed to two Spiralex Platforms and the difference was staggering. With the twenty year old Rock atop the platform, the sound was larger in every dimension with much deeper, tauter bass delivery. The midrange to treble regions became much sweeter.

Cable choice has to be done with the system in mind, so here's what I used: all signal cables were Musiflex, in a semi-balanced configuration from Connectronics. Loudspeaker leads were from Doncaster cables, which are sold by City Electrics. This cable is used in three-phase installation and comes in a variety of sizes and core types. It costs less than one percent of most super cables, and although it does not have a sexy jacket it really works well with most loudspeakers. Another point to be borne in mind is

the direction of the cables. We are all aware that loudspeaker cables have to be orientated correctly, but try this tip: the negative (return) should be in the opposite direction to the positive, so make it so. I've got more space within the image and deeper truer bass, with a truly expansive stereo image by running it this way - all we have to do is reverse the direction of the returns to the amplifier! Finally, mains power is supplied to my system through a totally isolated fuse box, with dedicated supplies for each group of sockets. This mod is expensive and is beyond the ability of the average do it yourselfer. But get in a qualified electrician and have the mod done as the difference is awesome. (Don't screw around with mains voltage, as it can kill you dead – here endeth the lesson!) Overall, this is an extremely natural, musical sounding system that sounds 'more than the sum of its parts', thanks to its obvious synergy. Next!

**SYSTEM:**

Townshend Rock [second-hand]	£200
Roksan Nima	£300
Goldring 1006	£60
Graham Slee Gram Amp 2	£99
Affordable Valve Co. VR-70E	£399
Acoustic Energy Aegis Evolution Three	£298



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THE
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me, myself, I

The second system set-up sees eighties child Channa Vithana embark upon a voyage of sheer, unadulterated audiophile narcissism!

I wanted to escape the multifunction button fetish environment that surrounds me. I admit that I usually only listen intensely to music, doing so by myself, rarely relying on 'background' music, as that doesn't work for me. Therefore with the above in mind, intimacy and tactile materiality is required where the instruments must have a clear identity as to their purpose - while being well made, good to look at and performing to an excellent standard. So what I have assembled is an entirely selfish and hands on system designed just for one!

For the source component, my weapon of choice is Naim Audio's CD2 CD player no less, which appeared way back in 1995. When reviewed in 1997 (retailing at £1,998) this August journal said, "(it) excites at the expense of subtlety... More at home in a Naim system". As a replacement for the Cdi/CD1, which shared its top loading transport with the CDS, the CD2 was subsequently replaced itself by the first CDX in 1998. This particular CD2 is in very good condition, and unlike the power supply upgrade potential of the CDX it is an extremely simple affair with only a single DIN output and switched IEC power input at the rear - less is more! It has the classic bespoke Naim Audio swing out drawer system similar to those still used by the latest CDX2, CD5X and CD5i.

The CD2 uses a suspended Philips CDM9Pro transport housed within the operationally slick and beautiful manual swing-out drawer. Designed by Roy George and the Naim R&D team, it is a real materialistic treat when opened. This drawer system was implemented for superior sound quality being preferable to traditional motor driven slide out mechanisms and uses a magnetic puck to hold the CD in place. The internal circuitry is isolated on a sprung chassis which along with the swing drawer requires transit bolts for transportation. The

CD2 has a Naim Audio linear power supply and the legendary Phillips TDA1541 16bit, four times oversampling DAC and SAA7220 digital filter. It weighs 9.6Kg.

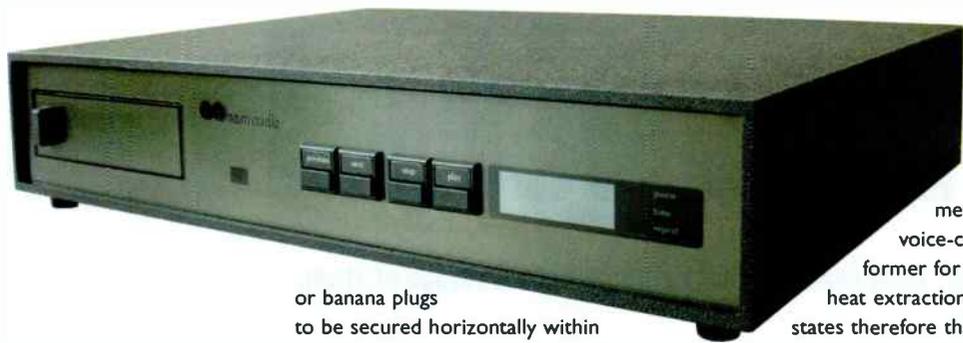
Although current Naim instruments have excellent build, finish and better operational functionality designed to appeal to a wider audience, I personally still think the last generation 1990s Naim Audio products such as this CD2 were their best ever designs. These Naims have - in my opinion - peerless visual presence. With their dark olive green front and continuous black aluminium sleeved cover giving them a 'darkly beautiful' industrial minimalist feel that I find just as attractive as any delicately crafted Italian design. To further this effect there is only a Naim Audio logo on the front, which lights up to indicate operation, very basic display and the absolute minimum of buttons needed - 'play', 'stop', 'prev' and 'next'. The current designs, while very good, look more in keeping with Art Deco style with their modulated three-piece fronts, sophisticated casework assembly and crescent shrouded Naim font. Though comparatively brutal, the old CD2 uses the late-eighties to late-nineties era Naim casework, which is therefore ironically of a more modern countenance.

The heart of my system is the Eclipse A502 amplifier, which I first came across about three years ago - and to me it remains so simple yet timelessly attractive. Devoid of any superfluous functionality, controls or badges its sculptural form wouldn't look out of place either as an ancient artefact found in a tomb or futuristic scientific device displayed in the London Science Museum! It's an uncomplicated hi-fi instrument with a single input through a set of gold plated phono sockets. It comprises three sections rather like a satellite, mothership and base station: large aluminium volume knob at the top, amplifier in the black central body and the power supply within silver



pedestal made from a substantial casting. The volume knob is perfectly weighted; neither flimsy nor overly heavy, moving with a balanced precision and lit by a series of LEDs. The uplighting is no gimmick, though attractive, as it illustrates the tactile point of this amp. Because, considering its small footprint the A502 can be used next to your seating position letting you adjust the volume at will without remote control, while the light provides unobtrusive yet useful illumination during late night sessions...

The black amplifier body has a very nice single-wire speaker connecting arrangement, with separate grooves enabling bare wire



or banana plugs to be secured horizontally within its undercarriage, minimising the chance of wires touching and short circuiting. It has three internal spikes aligning itself onto the silver power supply, leaving an attractively small external shadow-band around its conical form, adding to its visual sophistication. There is a DIN plugged umbilical from the rear of the black amplifier that accepts a DC feed from a socket in the silver power supply. The power supply has a fixed power chord for mains, a blue operation indicator LED and power switch situated within a folded crease vertically along the centre line of its front profile. The amplifier is rated at 30Wx2 with 6-ohm load impedance, weighs just over 6kg and measures 184x195x167mm, and the power supply 215x97x187mm.

The clever modular styling, build quality, fit and finish all work together to deliver simply one of the best pieces of industrial designs I have yet to see in audio. The compositional aspects of the design lend it a confident yet understated feel, which along with its tactile operation and usefulness as a hi-fi instrument, gives great 'ownership satisfaction' - separating it from other non-functional sculptures...

The loudspeakers are Monitor Audio's R852/MD. They're a relatively large pair of late 1980s standmounters measuring 450x250x278mm and weighing just under 10kgs each. Elac made both the R852/MDs drive units to MA's specification, and they look great with the grilles off, exposing their dark-copper/gold coloured dome tweeter. These days, Monitor Audio says this 25mm "super metal dome tweeter" (with vented magnet/voice coil, rear chamber and large ferrofluid damped magnet, claimed to give a smooth linear fast response to 21kg), "represented the first of a new breed of metal domes using an aluminium-magnesium alloy. MA says it, "sounds significantly better and smoother than all of its single-metal rivals, as until that time, most metal domes were single-metal types made from copper or titanium and virtually all sounded unconvincing" The tweeter also contains cooling to the

metal voice-coil former for good heat extraction. MA states therefore that,

"these fundamental and radical design elements formed the basis for a whole new generation of C-CAM metal domes from Monitor Audio".

The polypropylene coned

"without good quality cabling this system would be a nightmare..."

mid/bass driver is fitted within a 200mm aluminium cast chassis and contains a vented magnet pole design with a one piece voice coil assembly and dust cap. Both drive units are sealed into the cabinet with thin rubber/synthetic surround sleeves forming a very tight fitting enclosure. The cabinet is made of 18mm chipboard veneered on both sides with internal bracing while the crossover is a refreshingly simple two-component affair. They are a closed box (infinite baffle) type with single wired plastic sockets at the rear. MA claimed a frequency response of 50Hz-20kHz at -3dB, an impedance of 8ohms, sensitivity of 89dB and power handling of 15-120W - making them an unusually benign load by the standards of the day! They were available from around 1987 with an MA price list of £350 with standard teak, walnut and black finishes.

When I first had a look at the particular speakers used for the review, they were in a sorry state chipped and the walnut veneer faded where the grill had been in place. However their drive units were in good shape remaining agreeably stiff for an old speaker though the outer glued edges of the bass drivers are slightly peeling apart through old age. Their form and shape does not follow modern speaker thinking eschewing narrow baffle and deep cabinets, nor older themes of wide face and thin body, yet because of this they look just right! Without going through the expense of re-veneering them and being entirely happy with their sound I am gradually improving them by designing a new hardwood front baffle, which will advance aesthetics and protect the mid/bass driver fixing from further

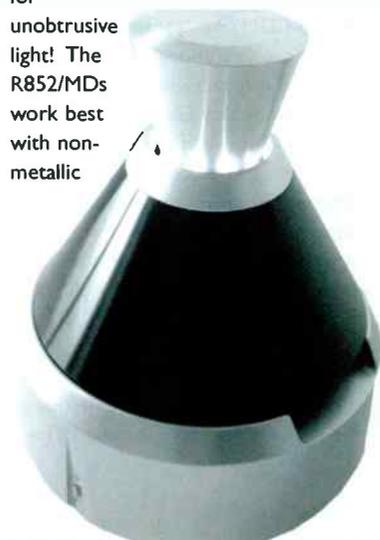
deterioration. Though at the moment in their painted state they remain a work in progress!

As for the cabling, I've used specific types to get the best from this particular system - I make no definitive claims here! I have used a new 1.8m Reference PowerKord by Russ Andrews, which uses Kimber's unique cable weave (claimed to remove RFI) with '16 Hyper-pure VariStrand copper conductors insulated with Teflon. It is very nicely fabricated with a flexible protective outer braid making it much easier in use than my original 1.8m five year old Reference PowerKord which has

a stiff plastic sheathing. Where the new PowerKord differs to my own is that it contains a Kimber Wattgate 350i IEC connection, which is claimed as a superior alternative to standard 'kettle plug' IECs. The 350i features a multi-layer 30 micron gold plating process, and RA says it's "regarded as the best IEC plug regardless of price", no less! Both signal cables are from The Chord Company. A DIN to phono Solid interconnect has been used, which is a "semi rigid design with a single silver plated conductor, Teflon dielectric and specially treated thin wall copper tube acting as a shield/return". While the speaker cable is Odyssey 4 single wired, consisting of doubling up of a standard Odyssey 2 which uses 12 gauge silver-plated Teflon insulated twisted pair conductors within a silicone rubber jacket.

SOUND QUALITY

Before I used the system in anger, I did what I always do [???! - Ed.] - which is to switch off the lights and phones, unplug the TV, disconnect the computer and fridge, close the curtains and switch on the amplifier for unobtrusive light! The R852/MDs work best with non-metallic



CONTACTS:

Eclipse (UK) Ltd.	0207 328 4499
Phonography (Naim CD2 supplier)	01425 61230
Russ Andrews Accessories Ltd.	01539 825 500
The Chord Company	01980 625 700

supports such as the all birch ply stands used for this review, sitting directly onto a floating laminate wood floor (over concrete) without any spikes or Blu Tack. I prefer this arrangement as the stands and speakers integrate better, transferring energy away at an agreeable rate without emphasising the ringing, resonating qualities of metal supports that I find interfere with the R852/MD's tweeter. They work very well close to the rear walls, which can help with better bass response while not adding congesting time smear to the midrange. I prefer them firing forward without toe-in, as they have no problems with specific directionality, radiating well into the room.

And so to battle! The combination of the exhilarating CD2, forward and transparent R852/MDs and neutral A502 sounds like a nightmare waiting to happen, so I wilfully tested them with some difficult music with the intention of catching them out. I used three thrillingly exciting recordings: Slayer's 'Reign In Blood', Nirvana's 'In Utero' and Zehetmair Quartet playing Schumann on ECM (2003). 'Reign In Blood' is an infamous Rick Rubin produced 'thrash metal' record: 10 tracks lasting a mere 26 minutes, vicious lead guitars, screeching vocals and the musical highlight being Dave Lombardo's phenomenal drumming all at breakneck speed.

The CD2 produced a gripping and fast response to the music with the R852/MDs revelling in the ferocity and speed without once sounding harsh or painful to the ears. The R852/MDs are disturbingly lightweight at first and while not suitable for bass fiends, once you get used to them they produce music not at the expense of conveying the complex structure and are highly revealing. 'Reign In Blood' usually catches out most standard hi-fi that concentrates on bass power at the expense of the cymbals, which become splashy and distorted. So it was with Lombardo's superhuman drumming however that the MAs really made sense of the music. Conveying the rolling bass fills (within their LF limitations) and ridiculously fast beats combining the complex HF layering effects of the

cymbals with consummate sophistication.

The Zehetmair Quartet was no less thrilling showing off this systems midrange response to magical effect - it was so tangible with the strings that it was simply hard to criticise. The speed and sudden power of the quartet when present was not in short supply either and it's this combined with the midrange sophistication that makes it special when played in this system.

'In Utero' is a difficult piece containing a very melodic musical structure hidden under distorted guitars fuelled by plenty of feedback manifest as buzz and hum. It is the antichrist to the hugely successful studio precision of Nirvana's 'Nevermind' and was credited as 'recorded' by (producer) Steve Albini. He is an expert at meticulous detail when 'recording', concerning the use of classic microphone placing techniques. Therefore 'In Utero' is an amazing sonic experience conveying all the nihilism and thunderous power of the compositions with a rare unvarnished feel. The CD2 and R852/MDs lapped up the music with glee, showing tremendous resolution and slam, while the A502 had no trouble transferring the terrifying bass power of the instruments into the room at above moderate volume levels - making the tactile use of the volume control more addictive.

TWEAKING

The 350i Reference PowerKord connected to the CD2 in place of the standard PowerKord provided more control at the expense of a little 'air', however, it allowed much higher volumes and was staggeringly good, removing a slight metallic sibilance in the R852/MD's treble! Additionally, it brought the midrange into exceptional focus and resolution. The Odyssey 4s proved very similar to the Odyssey 2s but with one main difference - they excelled with a deeper appreciation for the midrange, which was most beneficial, for all stringed instruments be they electric guitar or violin.

Overall, this system provides a super-clear, transparent and exhilarating arena for music. While not diverting from the mainstream of everyday hi-fi thinking when

considering resolution, transparency and timing, it cuts through the artifice of most standard hi-fi. It has a refreshing vitality and expressiveness, not harsh nor overtly forward and yet encompassing textural sophistication throughout the frequency range when present within recordings.

The CD2 is an excellent performer but is quite rare secondhand, with CD3/3.5 and CDSs being more common. The A502 is a beautiful object that is also a neutral and highly capable amplifier. While the Monitor Audio speakers present widescreen clarity, both musical and revealing. Without good quality cabling this system would be nightmare, so they are essential and the ones tested here worked synergistically to bring out its best.

This system lets you concentrate on sheer musical enjoyment without the problematic of remote controls, switching inputs/formats and needing a screen to operate. As a system it connects you to the source directly through its music making - and simple but striking design.

**THANKS TO:**

Annette Callam at Monitor Audio
Adam Meredith at Naim Audio

SYSTEM:

Naim CD2 [second-hand]	£700
Eclipse A502 Amplifier	£875
Monitor Audio R852/MD [secondhand]	£100
Chord Company Odyssey 4 [2x5m]	£340
Chord Company DIN-phono Solid	£60
Russ Andrews Ref. PowerKord [1.8m]	£219

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style council

The final system is from Scarborough's own style guru Dominic Todd, who wanted something out of the ordinary that really looked the part...

The last system I tested consisted of a Pathos Cinema-X amp, Sony SCD-XA9000ES SACD player and KEF Reference 207, PSW5000, 204c and 206ds 'speakers. The sound was awesome and intricate in equal measure. Indeed, with a combined price of £23,350, excluding cables, and a net weight of 225kg, I'd have been rather disappointed if it hadn't been. Yet, what really limited the appeal of this system was its sheer physical bulk. Even if one could afford the price, a room of at least forty square metres would be needed to really do it justice... Back in the real world, most of us live in smaller living environments and have an increasing amount of gadgets competing for space. With this in mind, I've set about creating a high quality system that not only sounds good and costs a realistic amount of money, but will also suit smaller rooms. It's important that not only the units themselves are of a compact size, but also that they have the sonic characteristics to suit. There's no point, for example, in having a compact, bookshelf, 'speaker that needs stand mounting one metre out from the rear wall...

At the heart of this system lies what has been the mainstay of the archetypical compact system for over twenty years. Now in its latest 8vs guise, the Cyrus amp, and matching PSX-R power supply, are better than ever. As has been the case for a while now, the Cyrus still uses a half width casing featuring a diecast magnesium alloy cover over polymer composite chassis. The idea is to avoid ferrous metals, which allow eddy current flow and, thus, harm the sound quality. The "vs" modifications are the result of a little lateral thinking on behalf of the Cyrus engineers. Essentially large value capacitors in the signal path have either been removed or bypassed and a "virtual servo" (hence the term vs) has replaced the existing servo amplifier. There are actually fewer esoteric components than before – something

that Cyrus used to make great play of with their 'military spec' electronics – but more attention paid to board layout and the use of close tolerance components. The PSX-R doesn't actually increase the power output of the 8vs, but it does take its power supply to a completely new level. In the past, this fully regulated supply has led to greatly improved focus, definition and expression. Without it the 8vs is merely very good, but with it the baby Cyrus is lifted into another league...

The CD player I was going to match up with this combo was the compact Audio Analogue Primo. Yet, after some preliminary listening, I was less than impressed. Yes it is compact and yes, its sonic balance does compliment the Cyrus, but it was simply too indistinct in many areas. Looking for a CD player that would have the same type of 'liquid' sound to compliment the rollicking Cyrus, actually, in the end, took me to the same company's Maestro model. This is a bulky unit, but the light silver finish and bi-level front panel do much to reduce the visual bulk. Like the Primo, the Maestro uses a CD-ROM. Unlike AA's junior player, however, it passes the digital signal through an upsampling Analog Devices 24-bit/192kHz DAC. Now, whilst no extra information can be retrieved from 16-bit CD, it does mean that far gentler filters can be used downstream. It's technique that has been used to great effect by Arcam, amongst others, and should lead to a more natural sound quality. The power supply feeding this utilises an oversized toroidal and features eight regulators and twin power transformers. A special mention must also go to the remote control which, unlike the Cyrus's rather bland affair, is both intuitive and a tactile treat.

Key to decent sound in a small room is the choice of 'speaker. Although Mission's 780SE have been around for some time, they are still one of the finest of their type. The look is familiar from the last ten years of small Mission 'speakers but,



to my eyes, they still manage to look fresh and modern. They are also very solidly built and finished in a range of attractive wood veneers. High frequencies are handled by a fibre dome tweeter, with the mid-range and bass being taken care of by a 130mm ceramic matrix cone. The latter of these is extremely light, yet given a high degree of rigidity by the baked in ceramic filler. Although these 'speakers are rear ported they sound at their best when positioned close to a rear wall. This makes them ideal for the system here, as does the clean, open sound, which should allow the best characteristics of the Cyrus and Audio Analogue to shine through.



SOUND QUALITY

Before I even begin with the sound quality, the Audio Analogue CD player raises an important point that isn't entirely unconnected. Most of the time its CD-ROM goes about its business in a quiet and effective manner. For some reason, however, it appeared to take a dislike to a handful of discs and showed this by grumbling the entire way through the album. This isn't peculiar to the Maestro, as I've heard it from other CD-ROM transports, but it is annoying at the best of times. In a system designed for a small room and, hence, with the listeners ear probably not far away, it is a positive distraction. Although the number of discs affected was few, I really can't help but think that hi-fi manufacturers should give more attention to mechanical integrity. If Audio Analogue, and a good deal of others,

disappointed. The vocal was dead centre, and all other instruments stayed resolutely within their allocated plot of stage. My only

concern was that the vocals were sounding a touch on the harsh side. This was probably a characteristic of the recording, but it would be something I'd be mindful of when tuning the system.

Considering the price of the system, I was hugely impressed by the rhythm and drive given to the Scissor Sisters' 'Laura'. I got the sense that the CD spinner and concise signal that the Cyrus combo dutifully relayed onto some particularly transparent 'speakers. Although all of the components sonic characteristics were present, it felt like one of those systems where, because of amp' and 'speaker transparency, one really feels as though one is listening to the CD player alone. In this case, that wasn't such a bad thing. What I was beginning to realise, however, was that this definitely wasn't the warm, smooth player that I'd envisaged. Instead there was a slight hardening of the vocals. That said, the upshot was a highly transparent soundstage and a wonderful level of detail that really encouraged the listener to

truthfulness of sound. It might have meant the vocals could occasionally a little forward, but the level of insight given also made for a highly compelling listen. Yet, although there was great thrust to the song, this didn't disguise the huge level of detail revealed. Although a great system to tap a foot along with, it also proved far from coarse or, for that matter, 'glossy', either. Listening to other Classical works cemented my opinion that this wouldn't be the first choice of systems for Classical music fans. I would put the blame here down to the 'speakers which, although pretty neutral, don't – like most Mission 'speakers – appear to get along with Classical music. Anyone who predominantly listens to Classical, therefore, would do well to consider an alternative, such as the Castle Richmonds. Despite this, the system proved highly incisive, incredibly transparent and immensely taut and rhythmic. It could be too sharp for some ears, but many would be won over by the highly involving balance.

TWEAKING

The first aspect to consider is that of support. Now, as this is supposed to be a compact system with the minimum of domestic intrusion, I've looked at isolation units to match. Bulky equipment stands are out as to are possibly 'speaker stands. With the

"whatever the room, what couldn't be denied was the combinations sheer precision and insight into the music..."

are going to use CD-ROMs, then they should really chose their transports more carefully, or at least modify the ones they have. Moan over, and on with the more subjective issue of sound quality. Kicking-off proceedings was Kelis's 'Trick Me'. The first surprise came from just how much bass the tiny Missions managed to produce. There wasn't the sort of bass that shakes the floorboards, but then 'speakers of this size are never going to do that anyway. Instead, there was convincing dynamics and a highly articulate and taut bass that could quite easily change your perception of 'speaker timing. At higher volumes there was a touch of congestion from the lowest notes but, for the majority of the time, the Missions simply, and sensibly, left out the very lowest bass notes altogether. I'd been expecting fine imagining, and I wasn't

"listen in" to the recording. In a small room, this can be an intoxicating balance as it's almost like listening to an especially large pair of headphones. Use the system in a larger room, however, and much of the effect is lost. Whatever the room, though, what couldn't be denied was the combinations sheer precision and insight into the music. It was one of those sounds that could really get under your skin.

Natasha Bedingfield's 'Size Matters' was presented with a bold presence that remained composed even at high volumes. Once again, for a 'speaker so small, the scale of sound was surprising. Perhaps more impressive still was the alacrity of timing and

Missions working at their best around 10cm from a rear wall, bookshelf mounting is a feasible option. There are, however, a few golden rules to remember. The first is to ensure the shelf is solid, level and free from as much clutter as possible



CONTACTS:

Audio Analogue &
Kemp Elektorniks UKD Audio
Cyrus
Mission
Apollo
Rothwell
DNM
Gale

01753 652669
01480 435577
01480 423700
0121 520 5070
01204 366133
01480 457989
0870 900 1000

– it's certainly not desirable to have the electronics mounted on the same shelf. It's quite simply the case that the clearer the shelf the better the imaging and sound stage will be. Next, you need to ensure that the 'speaker is firmly mounted to the shelf. The best thing for this is the simple metal cone. There's a wide choice available but, as these things really don't differ that much, I'd go for the cheapest around. I used some custom made brass cones knocked up by a local fabricator, but IXOS's Layerdiscs and spikes are a good alternative at around £33. So that the 'speaker remains dynamically balanced I would always use three, instead of four, spikes for each cabinet – one at the back and two at the front.

As I never usually audition 'speakers on a shelf, I was interested to hear the results compared to a stand. Perhaps not surprisingly, the sound did suffer. Against being placed on Apollo Olympus 6 stands, the sound was more congested, with a definite bloom from the lower/mid-range. Imaging was pretty good, but some of the focus was missing so that, whilst the sound stage may have been broad, some subtle nuances of sound were a little fuzzy. The moral is that if you really can't accommodate 'speaker stands then you're going to have to accept a slight, but discernable, deterioration in sound quality.

The same is true, to a lesser extent with the electronics. If you're placing them on a shelf, then it's worthwhile using an isolation support, such as the Atacama Staticstage (£35), which uses a rigid MDF board mounted on four FoculPods. Better still, however, is a dedicated table. The key to remember here is that it doesn't need to be either large or expensive. Shop around a bit and you can find some great bargains. Whilst spending a day in York I found a Sound Organisation ZO22 in a local hi-fi shop. This is a very compact and lightweight design, originally designed for turntables, which cost £100 new. This example had a slightly tatty shelf, but a very clean base, and for

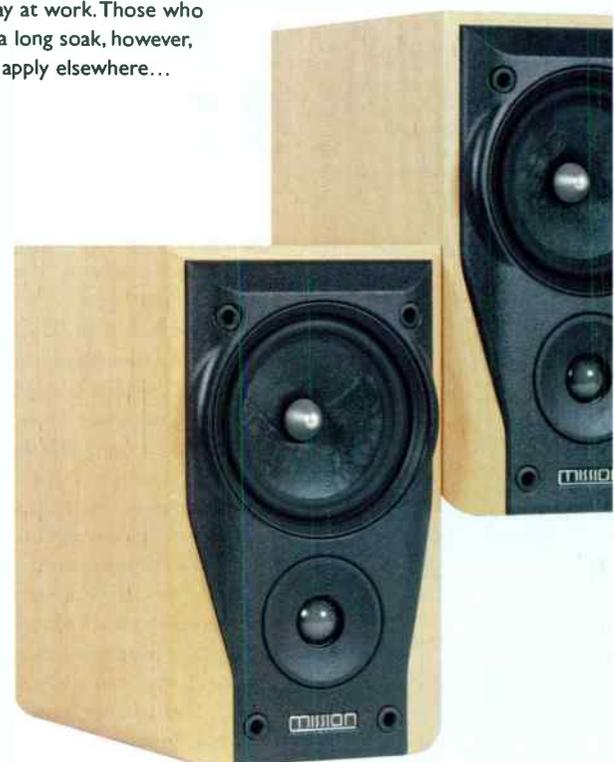
just £25 was a bargain to rival Ikea's finest. Next stop was a local fireplace store where I bought a piece of marble cut out from where the fire usually goes! This cost just £12 and so, for less than £40 in total, I had a very rigid, compact and visually unobtrusive support.

With the support taken care of it was time to focus on cables. After having tested a number of interconnects I settled on the Rothwell River. It may appear to be a rather scrawny affair, but is actually very well made. It uses silver plated copper conductors and has a particularly low capacitance. The lean, uncoloured sound complimented the electronics well, and showed little sign of adding its own sonic footprint. The choice of 'speaker cable was somewhat trickier. I tried various Audioquest, QED and Wireworld cables, but I finely settled on one of my old favourites – DNM's Reson. Don't be put off by the fact that this is only £7 per meter, as it will still happily outperform a good number of cables costing two or three times as much. I'll grant any detractors the fact that the bass isn't the strongest, but its sheer cohesion makes it hard to fault over extended periods of listening.

Usually I'd stick with bare connections, but as the Cyrus 8vs uses special, BFA, 'speaker terminals, plugs are essential. You can spend a fortune here and, to be honest, hardly notice any difference at all. I chose the cheap and cheerful Gale gold plugs which cost only £5 a pair, are a good tight fit in the Cyrus and are solder-less, hence a doddle to fit. With Audio Analogue having taken so much time over the Maestro's power supply it was reassuring to see they'd backed this up with an impressive looking mains cable. Listening revealed that, whilst not state of the art, it was certainly up to the job. The leads supplied with the Cyrus' were less distinctive and so quickly ditched in favour of a pair of Kemp Elektroniks Hi-Power cords. Of all the tweaks, these probably made the least difference but the bass did have a tiny bit more body to it.

All in all, this system didn't quite

turn out as I'd expected, and in more ways than one. The CD player I hadn't really been expecting to use and, it could be fairly said, is too large for what is supposed to be a compact system. I also had issues with its transport noise. This is a shame as, in many other respects this is a truly class leading player, with the sort of insight and transparency that would have been typical of a player costing twice the price only a couple of years ago. Yet, its very transparency can also be its downfall. Weaker recordings will, especially through this system, sound exactly that – weak. For those wanting a more compact player, a smoother ride or, indeed, both, then I would substitute the Maestro for an Arcam FMJ33. For those not too fussed about ultimate refinement, and who don't bother much with Classical music, this little combo' is pure dynamite. Like an eight-headed power shower, it's the type of system that will totally invigorate you after a hard day at work. Those who prefer a long soak, however, should apply elsewhere...

**SYSTEM:**

Analogue Audio Maestro CD player	£1,750
Cyrus 8vs amplifier	£800
Cyrus PSX-R power supply	£400
Mission 780 SE 'speakers	£350
Sound Organisation ZO22 [second-hand]	£37
Apollo Olympus 6 'speaker stands	£75
Rothwell River interconnect	£55
DNM Reson 'speaker cable	£7/m
Gale "gold" BFA type plugs	£5pr
Kemp Elektroniks Hi-Power mains leads	£56



WIN EXPOSURE'S SUPERB 2010S CD PLAYER IN THIS MONTH'S GREAT GIVEAWAY!

QUESTIONS

[1] Exposure has taken the trouble to design its own what?

- [a] aluminium extrusions and covers
- [b] gold fuses
- [c] copper plating
- [d] bespoke CD transport

[2] What type of DAC is used?

- [a] PCM1716
- [b] LPI976
- [c] CD1983
- [d] DCC1990

[3] Dominic Todd never found the Exposure what?

- [a] interesting
- [b] odd
- [c] tiresome
- [d] cheese-like

[4] How will most listeners find the 2010s?

- [a] "amazing"
- [b] "hugely entertaining"
- [c] "wicked"
- [d] "wibble"

January Competition
 Hi-Fi World Magazine
 Unit G4 Argo House
 The Park Business Centre
 Kilburn Park Rd.
 London NW6 5LF

Hi-Fi World gives you the chance to win a great little silver disc spinner in the shape of Exposure's 2010S. With its own bespoke CD transport and a staggering sound for the money, this £600 gem is real affordable high end stuff! Here's what Dominic Todd said about it in the November 2004 issue:

"With the new 2010S CD player, Exposure has taken the decision to produce its own CD transport - a brave move because such a thing doesn't come cheap... Designing a bespoke mechanism, micro controller and display takes plenty of both time and money. The competition all use 'off the shelf' designs, saves money on R&D and manufacturing costs. Other features new to the S model are a thicker case with new feet, an all new remote control, and improved fit and finish... There's a high capacity toroidal transformer with separate supplies for analogue and digital. A single surface mount PCM1716 24/96 DAC is carried, as is the, jitter reducing, high purity master clock. I was always rather fond of the original 2010, and the 2010S proved every bit as good... Because of the

snappy timing, it was certainly one of the more involving players to listen to... Whilst being slightly forward of balance, I never found the Exposure tiresome. Timing was greatly superior to the Inca Design Katana SE, for example, and the composition had a sense of spark that was second only to the Naim CD5i... it was the Exposure that proved the more engaging player to listen to.

Equally enjoyable was Jennifer Warnes' 'Nightingale'. Although a little loose in the treble, the 2010S avoided both the hardened mid-range and rather soft bass of its rivals... Instead it proved, given the price, remarkably transparent and consistent in its response across the frequency range. For its price, then, the 2010S is one impressive machine. Vivid pace and

impressive transparency make the 2010S one of the most involving players here. Equally impressive is the build. Smart, solid and well finished; the 2010S has a very professional and expensive feel... Remarkable value for money... It's a really super CD player, and one that most listeners will find hugely entertaining."

*If you'd like to win this superb bit of kit then all you have to do is answer the following four easy questions. Send your entries before 31st December 2004 to: **January Competition, Hi-Fi World magazine, Unit G4, Argo House, The Park Business Centre, Kilburn Park Road, London NW6 5LF.***

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 Michael Heryet of Stratton, North Cornwall**

Sevenoaks SOUND & VISION



Sevenoaks Sound & Vision

stocks a wide range of Hi-Fi separates, DVD players, amplifiers, speakers, plasma screens, LCD televisions and projection systems from all the leading manufacturers.

From starter systems to custom designed multi-room and home cinema installations, our friendly staff are available in all stores to advise, demonstrate and guide you through the home entertainment jungle. If you're interested in home entertainment and want to avoid the confusion, contact your local Sevenoaks Sound & Vision store and **experience more.**

0% interest free option* is available on most products.

*Written details on request. Licensed credit brokers. Minimum balance £400. Subject to status



CUSTOM INSTALLATION

Modern home entertainment doesn't have to be intrusive.

A carefully considered installation of home cinema with distributed audio and video and easy lighting control can give you all the sound and vision performance you could ever dream of - enhancing your lifestyle and your home.

Our custom install services range from the most simple, affordable solutions to the most grandiose. We can help transform every room and every home, whatever your needs and budget.

Want to know more? Why not pay us a visit and pick up a copy of our **FREE Custom**

Installation Guide, available now, from your local store.



Enjoy the freedom to listen to the music of your choice or watch TV independently from other rooms in the home



Our installation experts are fully trained to the highest standards and will continue to support you and your equipment long after your first visit to one of our nationwide stores



Flush-mounted in-wall speakers can give you all the sound you can handle, but won't eat into your floor space or clash with your decor



NEWSNEWSNEWS



NEW DENON AVR-1905 - AVAILABLE IN SILVER OR BLACK

DENON AVR-1905 & 2105 7.1 HOME CINEMA RECEIVERS

The AVR-1905 and AVR-2105 are two new Denon 7.1 channel receivers that offer astonishing value for money.



Features include the latest 32 bit audio decoding, 96kHz processing on all surround formats and a high current power supply. The '1905 delivers a healthy 80 watts per channel (8 ohms) while the '2105 delivers 90 watts and also includes auto set-up and calibration.

NEW EALING STORE

The long-awaited store in Ealing is now open.

Part of a newly developed parade in the heart of town close to Ealing Broadway tube and on the fringe of the Ealing Broadway Shopping Centre, the store offers an unrivalled experience to shoppers searching for the best in audio and video equipment.



24 THE GREEN
EALING
020 8579 8777

OPEN
MONDAY-SATURDAY 10:00-6:00
SUNDAY 12:00-4:00



ABERDEEN (NEW)

BEDFORD
BIRMINGHAM
BRIGHTON
BRISTOL
BROMLEY
CAMBRIDGE
CARDIFF
CHELSEA
CHELTENHAM
CRAWLEY
CROYDON

EALING (NEW)

EDINBURGH
EPSOM
EXETER
GLASGOW
GUILDFORD
HOLBORN
HULL
IPSWICH
KINGSTON
LEICESTER
LEEDS

LINCOLN
MAIDSTONE
MANCHESTER
NEWCASTLE
NORWICH
NOTTINGHAM
OXFORD
PETERBOROUGH

PLYMOUTH
POOLE
PRESTON
READING

SEVENOAKS
SHEFFIELD
SOLIHULL
SOUTHAMPTON
SOUTHGATE
STAINES
SWINDON (NEW)
SWISS COTTAGE
TUNBRIDGE WELLS
WATFORD
WEYBRIDGE
WITHAM (ESSEX)
WOLVERHAMPTON

PLEASE SEE PAGE 7
FOR ADDRESS AND TELEPHONE
NUMBER DETAILS

Sevenoaks SOUND & VISION

"A perfect combination of early Arcam refinement and subtlety, combined with new-found vitality and freshness." DVA CD192

**Arcam DiVA
CD192 CD Player £849.95
A90 Amplifier £849.95**

WHAT Hi-Fi FIT
MAY 04
★★★★★

HI-FI SEPARATES



**Roksan Caspian M Series-1
CD Player £1099.95
Amplifier £999.95**

"A real class-contender, the new M Series-1 is a canny piece of kit and well worth the money." M SERIES-1 CD PLAYER

"A fine piece of equipment." M SERIES-1 AMPLIFIER

WHAT Hi-Fi FIT
MAY 04
★★★★★



FREE **FREE GRADO SR60 HEADPHONES WORTH £90**
WHEN YOU PURCHASE AN AMP AND CD TOGETHER FROM ONE OF THE FOLLOWING MANUFACTURERS - ARCAM, CYRUS & ROKSAN*
NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION

WHAT Hi-Fi FIT
MAY 04
★★★★★

Awards 2004
BEST STEREO AMPLIFIER
SOUND & VISION
Cyrus 8vs

WHAT Hi-Fi FIT
AUG 04
★★★★★

Awards 2004
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
CD PLAYER
Cyrus CD8x



**Cyrus
8vs Amplifier £799.95
CD8 X CD Player £999.95**

Cyrus has been developing high performance hi-fi systems for over 20 years. Today their upgradeable, modular product range includes multi-room systems, home cinema and some of the world's finest hi-fi systems. The new 'VS' preamp circuitry, incorporated in the 6vs and 8vs amplifiers, has dramatically improved their performance while the CD8 X is a heavily revised version of the CD8.

"Here's a machine that advances the ability of its excellent predecessor by an almost absurd degree. The Cyrus 8vs is an absolute superstar."

"The added 'x' factor brings a level of CD playback previously unheard at this price." CD8 X

WHAT Hi-Fi FIT
MAY 04
★★★★★

Cyrus 6vs Amplifier £599.95

"A significant upgrade to what was already an impressive amp - Cyrus' new entry-level integrated is a peach"

WHAT Hi-Fi FIT
OCT 04
★★★★★



WHAT Hi-Fi FIT
MAY 04
★★★★★

Awards 2004
BEST TUNER
SOUND & VISION
Project Debut III

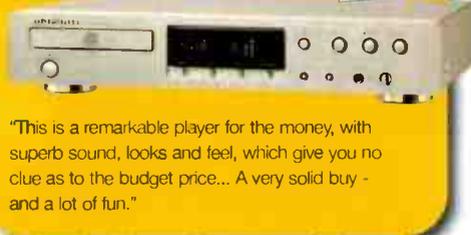


**Pro-ject
Debut III Turntable
(Black) £129.95
(Colours) £144.95**

"Building on the Award-winning design of its predecessors, the new Pro-ject Debut III delivers a thrillingly good sound for the money... Products like this should really reinvigorate your interest in hi-fi."

**Marantz
CD5400 CD Player
£119.95**

WHAT Hi-Fi FIT
MAY 04
★★★★★



"This is a remarkable player for the money, with superb sound, looks and feel, which give you no clue as to the budget price... A very solid buy - and a lot of fun."

**Sony
ST-SDB900
Digital/Analogue Tuner
£ CALL**

WHAT Hi-Fi FIT
MAY 04
★★★★★

Awards 2004
PRODUCT OF THE YEAR
TUNER
SONY ST-SDB900



"The Sony ST-SDB900 is a great tuner for the money, and is definitely capable of giving our current Award-winner, the excellent DRX-702ES, a run for its money."

WHAT Hi-Fi FIT
MAY 04
★★★★★

Product of the Year 2003

**Pure Digital DRX702ES
Digital/Analogue Tuner
£279.95**



WHAT Hi-Fi FIT
MAY 04
★★★★★

Best Buy 2003



**Michell Gyro SE
Turntable / R8300 Tonearm
£1049.95**

"The Gyrodec SE sounds great, combining the best sonic characteristics of rivals... Quite simply, the Michell Gyrodec SE is terrific. Nothing compares at this price point - it's well deserving another Best Buy."

CLAIM £50 TOWARDS THE GOLDRING CARTRIDGE OF YOUR CHOICE*

**Pure Digital DRX702ES
Digital/Analogue Tuner
£279.95**

"So do you buy a digital tuner? Or an analogue one? Now you don't have to pick: just buy Pure Digital's DRX-702ES! Whether on FM or DAB, this tuner sounds superb... The overall balance is powerful, clean and crisp, making this a fine tuner by any standards, and a superb buy given its excellent flexibility."

experience more

experience more
experience more



FREE QED CABLE WORTH £60*

KEF Q4 Speakers £399.95

The Q4 is one of the latest additions to KEF's acclaimed Q Series. At the heart of this floorstander lies the Uni-Q driver array - a 130mm die-cast chassis housing a long throw cone and coincident mounted 19mm aluminium dome HF unit. This driver arrangement makes

the speaker much easier to place in the room and alleviates the 'sweet spot' found on 'ordinary' speakers. This has been combined with a dedicated 130mm LF unit for extended bass output which belies the size of its diminutive cabinet.

FREE QED

SPEAKER CABLE WORTH

WITH ALL HI-FI SPEAKER PAIRS OVER £299*	£60	WITH SPEAKERS OVER £299
	£80	WITH SPEAKERS OVER £499
	£120	WITH SPEAKERS OVER £999

FREE QED CABLE WORTH £60*

Quad 11L Speakers £379.95

"The wonderful Quad 11Ls continue to defy all known laws of value: they have a real wood-veneer finish with piano-gloss lacquer - unheard of at the price. Yet nothing sonically has been sacrificed... The Quads are amazing value for money - no rival speakers come close."



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2004 BEST STEREO SPEAKERS £350-£500 Quad 11L



Musical Fidelity

- X-80 Amplifier **£399.95**
- X-150 Amplifier **£799.95**
- X-Ray[™] CD Player **£899.95**

The 40 wpc, X-80 and the 80wpc X-150 amplifiers are part of Musical Fidelity's revamped X-Series. Both models feature a dual-gang analogue volume control and high-output transistors for each channel. The X-150 also includes a high quality phono stage.

The X-Ray[™] CD player, replacement for the legendary X-Ray, uses the same DAC and upsampling principles as the acclaimed Tri-Vista SACD player.



Wharfedale Diamond 9.1 Speakers £179.95

"The overall balance of the speakers is their finest characteristic. Thanks to near-perfect driver integration, music sounds wonderfully natural and transparent... This is a bar-raising effort from Wharfedale: these are ridiculously good speakers at the budget price level."



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2004 PRODUCT OF THE YEAR STEREO SPEAKERS

Roksan Kandy KD1/III CD Player £649.95 KA1/III Amplifier £649.95

"Timing and rhythm are excellent. DJ Shadow is delivered with clarity and a tight bass, while at the other extreme the treble is sweet and detailed, getting the most from Wagner's *Ride of the Valkyries*. The result is a breathtaking Best Buy amplifier that betters its competition with **ebase**." KANDY KA1/III AMPLIFIER - AWARDS 2003



WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2004 BEST STEREO AMPLIFIERS £500-£1000 Roksan Kandy

"The Kandy KD1/III CD player offers a great array of talents - team it with its amp stablemate and you have something close to the ideal visual and sonic combination."

WHAT HI-FI? AWARDS 2003 ★★★★★

FREE

GRADO SR60 HEADPHONES WORTH £90 WHEN YOU PURCHASE AN AMP AND CD TOGETHER FROM ONE OF THE FOLLOWING MANUFACTURERS - ARCAM, CYRJS & ROKSAN* NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION

PRICING POLICY

We always try to ensure our prices are highly competitive. In the event you can find the same products and excellent service at a lower price, please bring it to our store managers' attention.

0%

FINANCE OPTION*

Spread the cost of buying. 0% finance option is available on the vast majority of products we stock.

*Written details on request. Licensed credit brokers. Minimum balance £400. Subject to status.

PLEASE NOTE: SOME PRODUCTS MAY NOT BE AVAILABLE AT ALL STORES. PLEASE CALL BEFORE TRAVELLING.

***ADDED VALUE OFFERS - FROM RANGE AVAILABLE IN-STORE. NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER. ADVERTISEMENT VALID UNTIL AT LEAST 15/12/04, E&OE.**



Rotel 10 Series RA-1062 Amplifier £594.95 RCD-1072 CD Player £594.95

"At the heart of the 60-watt RA-1062 is a toroidal transformer and a power supply, which Rotel claims, helps the amp maintain performance even at high volumes... Crank up the volume and, as promised, the Rotel keeps its composure and balance... If you want a £600 integrated, be sure to audition the RA-1062.

First impressions of the RCD-1072 are excellent. This is the slickest machine in this group: the casework feels solid and the finish exceptional at the price... On its own terms it remains an enjoyable and informative CD player."

WHAT HI-FI? SOUND AND VISION • SEPTEMBER 2003



Mission m34i Speakers £329.95

"The original m34s impressed us with their easy-going bass, but had an undynamic and uninvolved balance. Not the m34is: they're refined and enjoyable... You'll be hard pressed to find a better balance of talents anywhere else for this amount of money."

WHAT HI-FI? Sound and Vision
Oct 04
★★★★★

FREE
QED CABLE
WORTH £60

Acoustic Energy Aelite Three Speakers £749.95

"Acoustic Energy's new Aelite Threes weigh in at a hefty 18kg a piece, and their curved, real wood finished cabinets both look handsome and make good acoustic sense... So now do they perform... Give them a big room and position them in free space and they'll deliver great things... If you want a big sound for sensible money, don't hesitate to audition the Aelite Threes."

WHAT HI-FI? Sound and Vision
Sept 04
★★★★★

FREE
QED CABLE
WORTH £80

Yamaha CDR-HD1300/II CD Recorder £ CALL



No more wasted CD-Rs: in a stroke of genius Yamaha had the idea of combining a CD recorder with a hard drive, enabling you to edit your music before you burn. The CDR-HD1300/II is the upgraded version of the Award-winning 'HD1300 offering even greater disc capacity."

WHAT HI-FI? Sound and Vision
Awards 2004
BEST CD RECORDER
Yamaha CDR-HD1300

Mission m31i Speakers £139.95

"Overall, the little m31i speakers are great, and the team at Mission should consider this upgrade job well done. The 'i' in the model name stands for 'improved' and these speakers fully deserve the suffix."

WHAT HI-FI? Sound and Vision
Nov 04
★★★★★



Roksan Caspian M-Series Preamp/2 x Monoblocks £3449.95

"This Roksan is an excellent buy that puts most of the opposition to shame when it comes to sonic ability... If you want the most honest-sounding amp you can get for your money, this combo can't be ignored."

WHAT HI-FI? Sound and Vision
Awards 2004
BEST STEREO AMP
OVER £2000
Roksan Caspian M-102

FREE
QED CABLE
WORTH £120



Acoustic Energy AE1 MKIII Speakers FROM £1699.95

"The legendary AE1 lives on in this groundbreaking third version... The Mk IIIs are worthy of the AE1 name, taking small-speaker performance to another level."

B&W 704 Speakers £1399.95

The 704 speakers are part of B&W's new 700 series. These floorstanding, two-and-a-half-way, vented box speakers are available in a variety of attractive finishes. In a recent What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision group test the 704 offered "Remarkable openness and clarity that is unrivalled at this price."

WHAT HI-FI? Sound and Vision
Nov 04
★★★★★

FREE
QED CABLE
WORTH £120



COMPACT SYSTEM

Denon DM31 UD-M31 CD Receiver £189.95

When purchased with speakers over £99*
When purchased on its own £199.95

"The D-M30 was exemplary, as its three What Hi-Fi? Sound and Vision Awards clearly show. The D-M31 is even better, making it phenomenal value for money."

NB - DENON DM31 PRICE EXCLUDE SPEAKERS



WHAT HI-FI? Sound and Vision
Awards 2004
BEST HI-FI RECORD SYSTEM OVER £150
Denon D-M31

PLEASE NOTE: SOME PRODUCTS MAY NOT BE AVAILABLE AT ALL STORES. PLEASE CALL BEFORE TRAVELLING.

*ADDED VALUE OFFERS - FROM RANGE AVAILABLE IN-STORE. NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER. ADVERTISEMENT VALID UNTIL AT LEAST 15/12/04, E&OE.

experience more

experience more
experience more



WIRELESS NETWORKING

MUSIC ALL AROUND THE HOME



You've heard of hi-fi – now welcome to the world of wi-fi! Wi-fi devices allow you to network a range of devices together – from your music system to your PC – without the wires. For example, a multiroom server like Yamaha's MusicCAST can wirelessly send music to up to five 'client' playback systems dotted around your home. That music could be stored on the MusicCAST server device or other sources – existing hi-fi kit, maybe, or an internet radio station or MP3 files from your PC: plug-in adapters make it easy to wi-fi-enable products.



Cyruslink
AVAILABLE AT SELECTED SEVENOAKS SOUND & VISION STORES

SUGGESTED HI-FI SEPARATE SYSTEMS

Sevenoaks has carefully chosen three hi-fi separate systems. All components have been selected for their performance, reliability and compat. bility.

These systems represent superb value for money with massive savings on the individual component prices.

Simply add speaker and interconnect cables and other accessories from our extensive range available in-store.



Rotel
RCD-02 CD Player
RA-02 Amplifier
Monitor Audio
Bronze B2 Speakers

£799.95 SAVE £129

PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

HI-FI SYSTEM 1 - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION

1
HI-FI SYSTEM



Arcam
CD73T CD Player
A65 Plus Amplifier
KEF
Q4 Speakers

£999.95 SAVE £149

PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES & STANDS

HI-FI SYSTEM 2 - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION

2
HI-FI SYSTEM



Roksan
Kandy KD1/III CD Player
Kandy KA1/III Amplifier
Monitor Audio
Silver S6 Speakers

£1889.95 FREE SOUNDSTYLE RACK WORTH £300

PRICE EXCLUDES CABLES

HI-FI SYSTEM 3 - NOT IN CONJUNCTION WITH ANY OTHER OFFER OR PROMOTION

3
HI-FI SYSTEM

Sevenoaks SOUND & VISION



PRODUCT RANGE

An outstanding selection of products are on display and available for demonstration at all Sevenoaks Sound & Vision stores.

However, some products may not be available at all stores. Please call to check availability before travelling.

TURNTABLES

Goldring GR1	£139.95
Michell Gyro SE/RB300 ES0 GOLDRING CARTRIDGE*	£1049.95
Michell TechnoDec (Ex Arm)	£574.95
Project Debut Phono SB	£169.95
Project Debut III (Black)	£129.95
Project Debut II (Colours)	£144.95
Project 1 Xpression	£209.95

TUNERS

Arcam DIVA T61	£229.95
Cyrus FM X	£499.95
Denon TU26CL MKII	£99.95
Harman Kardon TU970 DAB/AM/FM	£299.95
Marantz ST4000	£99.95
Pure DRX-701ES DAB	£199.95
Pure DRX-702ES Analogue/DAB	£279.95
Roksan Kandy KT1 MKII	£549.95
Sony ST-SDB900	£ CALL

CD PLAYERS

Arcam DIVA CD73T	£399.95
Arcam DIVA CD192	£849.95
Arcam FMJ CD33T	£1349.95
Cyrus CD6	£599.95
Cyrus CD8 X	£999.95
Cyrus DAC X	£1099.95
Denon DCD485	£119.95
Linn Genki	£1099.95
Linn Ikemi	£2199.95
Marantz CD5400	£119.95
Marantz SA11 S1	£1999.95
Musical Fidelity X-Ray 6	£899.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A308*	£1999.95
Quad 99 CD-P	£999.95
Roksan Kandy KD1 MKII	£649.95
Roksan Caspian M	£1099.95
Rotel RCD02	£379.95
Rotel RCD1072	£594.95

CD RECORDERS

Pioneer PDR609 CD-RW	£199.95
Sony RCD-W100	£ CALL
Yamaha CDR-HD1300M*	£ CALL

AMPLIFIERS

Arcam DIVA A65 Plus	£389.95
Arcam DIVA A80	£599.95
Arcam DIVA A90	£849.95
Arcam FMJ A32	£1199.95
Cyrus 6vs	£599.95
Cyrus 8vs	£799.95
Cyrus Pre X vs Pre	£1099.95
Cyrus Mono X Power (Each)	£1199.95
Denon PMA355	£179.95
Linn Kolektor Pre	£574.95
Linn LK85 Power	£544.95
Marantz PM4400	£149.95
Marantz PM7200	£249.95
Marantz PM11 S1	£2499.95

Musical Fidelity X-80	£399.95
Pioneer DV668Av Universal	£799.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2	£979.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Pre	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A3.2 Power	£999.95
Musical Fidelity A308	£1999.95
Quad 99 Power	£549.95
Roksan Kandy KA1 MKII	£649.95
Roksan Caspian M	£999.95
Roksan Caspian M Pre	£1249.95
Roksan Caspian M Monobloc Power (Each)	£1099.95
Rotel RA-01	£249.95
Rotel RA-02	£349.95
Rotel RA-1062	£594.95

SPEAKERS

Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo One	£139.95
Acoustic Energy Aegis Evo Three	£259.95
Acoustic Energy Aelite Two	£449.95
Acoustic Energy Aelite Three	£749.95
Acoustic Energy AE1 MKII (From)	£1699.95
AVI Neutron IV	£499.95
B&W DM601 S3	£249.95
B&W DM602 S3	£299.95
B&W 704	£1399.95
B&W 705	£899.95
KEF Q1	£249.95
KEF Q4	£399.95
KEF XQ1	£749.95
Linn Katan	£649.95
Mission m31i	£139.95
Mission m34i	£329.95
Mission 7805E	£349.95
Mission 7825E	£899.95
Monitor Audio Bronze B2	£199.95
Monitor Audio Silver S1	£299.95
Monitor Audio Silver S6	£599.95
Monitor Audio Silver S8	£799.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 10	£799.95
Monitor Audio Gold Reference 20	£1499.95
Quad 11L	£379.95
Quad 12L	£499.95
Quad 22L	£894.95
Ruark Epigoue II	£344.95
Ruark Talsman III	£1499.95
Ruark Sabre III	£899.95
Wharfedale Diamond 9.1	£179.95
Wharfedale Pacific Evolution 30	£649.95

HI-FI SYSTEMS

Denon 201 Ex Speakers	£499.95
Denon DF101 Ex Speakers	£299.95
Denon DM31 Ex Speakers	£199.95
Linn Classik Music Ex Speakers	£849.95
Teac Legacy 600 Ex Speakers	£199.95

DVD SYSTEMS

Denon ADV-M71 Inc SC-M51 Speakers	£499.95
Denon DHT-500SD Inc 5.1 Speaker Package	£ CALL
Denon DVD-770SD/AVR-770SD Ex Speakers	£ CALL
Jamo DVR50/A305PDD Inc Speakers	£649.95
Jamo DVR50/A355PDD Inc Speakers	£899.95
KEF KIT100 Inc Speakers	£1199.95
Linn Classik Movie Di Ex Speakers	£2299.95
Teac Legacy 700/LS-L800 Inc Speakers	£799.95

MULTI-ROOM AUDIO

Cyrus Linkserver 160	£2999.95
Cyrus Linkserver 250	£3499.95
Cyrus Linkport	£649.95
Cyrus Linkwand	£199.95
Yamaha MusicCast MCX A10	£599.95
Yamaha MusicCast MCX 1000	£1799.95

DVD PLAYERS

MAKE & MODEL	REGION 2	MULTI REGION
Arcam DIVA DV78	£699.95	£699.95
Arcam DIVA DV79	£999.95	£999.95
Arcam FMJ DV29	£1599.95	£1599.95
Cyrus DVD8	£1199.95	£1199.95
Denon DVD-1710	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-2200 Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-2900 Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-2910 Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-3910 Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Denon DVD-A11	£ CALL	£ CALL
Harman Kardon DVD22	£299.95	£299.95
Harman Kardon DVD31	£399.95	£399.95
Marantz DV4500	£199.95	£199.95
Meridian G98	£3349.95	£3349.95
Pioneer DV370	£ CALL	£ CALL

Pioneer DV575A Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DV668Av Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DV868Avi Universal	£ CALL	£ CALL
Toshiba SD240E	£ CALL	£ CALL
Toshiba SD340E	£ CALL	£ CALL
Yamaha DVD-S540	£ CALL	£ CALL
Yamaha DVD-S550	£ CALL	£ CALL

DVD RECORDERS

MAKE & MODEL	REGION 2	MULTI REGION
Panasonic DMR-E55 DVD-RAM	£ CALL	£ CALL
Panasonic DMR-E65 DVD-RAM	£ CALL	£ CALL
Panasonic DMR-E75 DVD-RAM	£ CALL	£ CALL
Panasonic DMR-E85 DVD-RAM	£ CALL	£ CALL
Panasonic DMR-E95 DVD-RAM	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DVR-520H HDD/DVD-RW	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DVR-720H HDD/DVD-RW	£ CALL	£ CALL
Pioneer DVR-920H HDD/DVD-RW	£ CALL	£ CALL
Sony RDR-HX900 DVD-RW/H-RW	£ CALL	£ CALL

A/V AMPLIFIERS RECEIVERS & PROCESSORS

Arcam AVR250 A/V Receiver	£999.95
Arcam AVR300 A/V Receiver	£1299.95
Arcam AVB/P7 A/V Pre/Processor/Power	£5749.95
Cyrus AVB A/V Processor	£1099.95
Denon AVC-A15RA A/V Amplifier	£ CALL
Denon AVR1705 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Denon AVR1905 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Denon AVR2105 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Denon AVR2805 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Denon AVR3805 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Harman Kardon AVR330 A/V Receiver	£599.95
Harman Kardon AVR630 A/V Receiver	£999.95
Harman Kardon DPR2005 A/V Receiver	£1299.95
Marantz SR4500 A/V Receiver	£349.95
Marantz SR5500 A/V Receiver	£449.95
Onkyo TX-NR801E A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Pioneer VSX-DB12 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Pioneer VSX-DB14 A/V Receiver	£299.95
Pioneer VSX-A33 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Pioneer VSX-2014 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Pioneer VSX-A35 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Pioneer VSX-A35A A/V Receiver	£1199.95
Pioneer VSA-A10A A/V Amplifier	£ CALL
Rotel RSX1067 A/V Receiver	£1799.95
Rotel RSP1066/RMB1075 A/V Pre/Power	£1799.95
Rotel RSP1098 A/V Processor	£2294.95
Sony STR-DB795 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Yamaha DSP-AK750SE A/V Amplifier	£ CALL
Yamaha DSP-29 A/V Amplifier	£ CALL
Yamaha RX-V550 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Yamaha RX-V650 A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Yamaha RX-V1400RDS A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Yamaha RX-V1500RDS A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Yamaha RX-V2400RDS A/V Receiver	£ CALL
Yamaha RX-V2500 A/V Receiver	£899.95

A/V SPEAKERS & PACKAGES

Acoustic Energy Evo 3B	£699.95
Acoustic Energy Aego P5/II	£499.95
Acoustic Energy Aelite 5.1	£1894.95
Articooustic Diablo	£994.95
B&W VM1/AS1	£849.95
B&W DM300 AV	£899.95
Castle Compact CC3	£999.95
KEF KHT1005 £100 FREE QED CABLE*	£499.95
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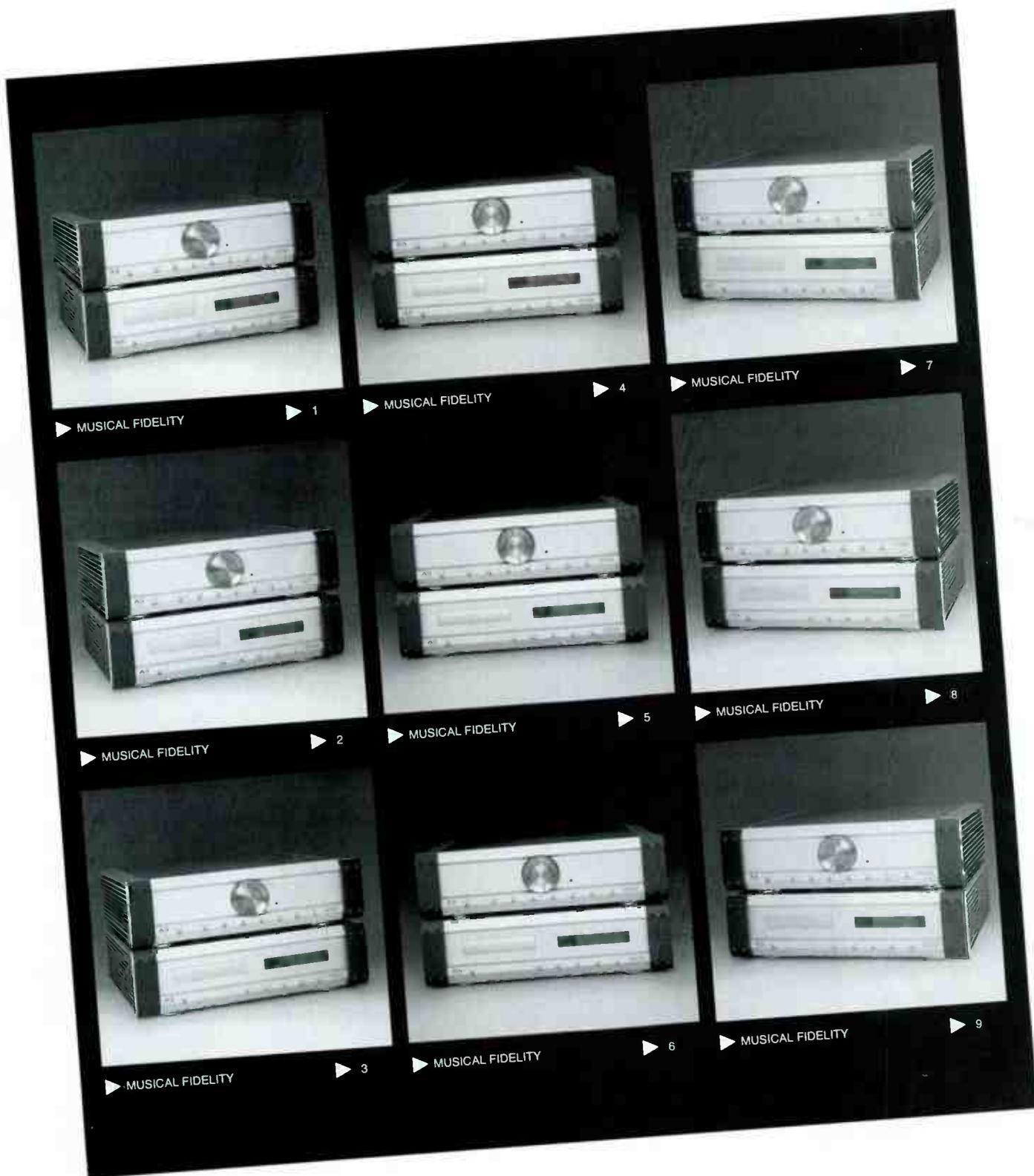
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TWEAKING

Whilst the performance of the stock unit is fantastic, the fact remains that it has been built down to a price. Most components inside the Pioneer are of the surface mount variety and are best left untouched.

However the output capacitors are bog standard cheap types that can be replaced for better sounding types such as Black Gates. Replacing these really helped the Pioneer achieve its true potential. The slightly overblown bass was tamed, and sound simply blossomed out of the speakers in a truly life-like manner. High frequency detailing was astounding. A simple mod then, but one that comes highly recommended – if you know what you're doing, of course.

much of the album. Detail was very impressive, and the imaging was almost startling at times. Moving to the CD only layer showed that this appeared to be a trait of the original recording, so the Pioneer was just being honest. Bob Dylan's classic 'Blood On The Tracks' showed that SACD on the Pioneer could really sparkle. The opening track 'Tangled Up In Blue' possessed the kind of clarity and immediacy that was bewitching. I've heard this recording many, many times before, but this generated in me a renewed interest and respect for this album. The levels of detail present in this recording consistently arrested my attention and failed to let go.

The DVD-A of The Band's 'The Last Waltz' was next in line for the Pioneer. This is only a 48kHz/24bit release, but it was still a marked improvement over the CD layer with its atmosphere, detail and wonderful sense of special ambience. This recording is not one of the best however, and the Pioneer faithfully relayed this fact. Tonal colour is quite limited on this recording, and the treble rather bright and peaky. Despite this the Pioneer still managed to cut to the heart and soul of this live (overdubs aside) recording. Bass power in particular was tactile and full-bodied. I can only begin to imagine how it would sound with a well-mastered 24/192 disc. The only downside is that the Pioneer really needs to be hooked up to a display device to access the menu's on DVD-A, otherwise you're never entirely sure whether you've chosen the correct mix to listen to depending on your speaker set-up



(2-channel or surround). A little more information in the display window would be a really helpful addition here...

CONCLUSION

Frankly I am astounded by the Pioneer DV-575A, considering its lowly retail price. Not only can it play just about every current format worth mentioning, but is also possessed of a level of performance that should have the competition nervous! That this player can hold its own with the likes of the Naim CDI – in some respects, at least - is testament to its music-making abilities. It also raises the somewhat awkward question that if Pioneer can produce a machine like this for £120, why then should anyone want to buy one further up the range and spend considerably more, unless they're after better build quality and HDMI capability?

Incidentally, for those that were wondering, the Pioneer also possessed a very fine picture when playing DVD Video. No complaints here either.

Downsides? Apart from its biscuit tin build [forgivable at this price, I rather think - Ed.], the transport is noisy. I noticed this when I left the player on repeat over night, and then attempting to get to sleep! Skipping tracks also results in some alarming grinding noises emanating from within the player. Those that listen to a lot of quiet music, or play at low levels might find this something of a distraction. In normal listening conditions however I rarely found this a problem. Every once in a while a product comes along that shakes things up. Ironically the last budget

sensation which could hold its head high as far as performance was concerned was also made by Pioneer, the legendary A400 integrated amplifier. Pioneer has an absolute cracker of a player on their hands here – and even more so if you modify it [see **TWEAKING**]. I am left wondering whether this was some happy accident of corporate design work? I wait with interest to see what the competition will respond with. As it stands, word is that Pioneer cannot keep up with the demand for this player, such is its popularity at present. As far as universal players are concerned, there are currently no competitors at this price point. So, I invite you to shelve your pre-conceived notions on cheap players and ignore its budget price – the Pioneer DV-575A is a little music-making marvel.

VERDICT ●●●●

An amazing little player at the price - incisive and organic, it cuts straight to the heart of any performance.

PIONEER DV-575 £120
PIONEER GB LTD.
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FOR
 - sublime sound per pound
 - universal Player
 - cost

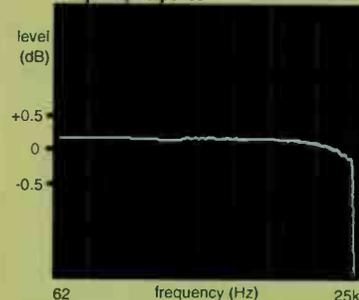
AGAINST
 - build
 - transport noise
 - looks

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

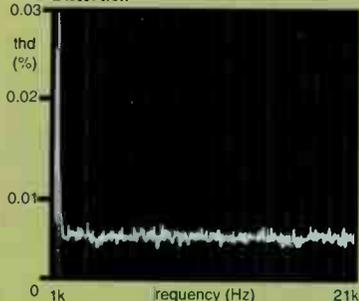
The DV-575A reaches out to 33kHz with both DVD-A (152kHz) and SACD. It's a bit more limited here than Pioneer's more expensive models, but the roll off is smooth and analogue like above	-6dB	0.0004%	0.0002%	0.0006%
33kHz, itself quite important since the filter phase characteristics are less extreme. CD reaches up to 21kHz as usual, but there's a little top end roll-off to ensure that treble sharpness doesn't intrude. So the frequency response characteristics are fairly benign.	-40dB	0.38%	0.3%	0.4%
I was surprised to measure more distortion than is common from DVD-A or SACD, in contrast to a well known model like the DV-856A. At -40dB the 575 produced 2.8% distortion, against 0.5% for the 856 with DVD-A, and results were much the same with SACD. The 575 may well sound just a trifle less clear than more expensive designs. Dynamic range (EIAJ) with CD was a mediocre 106dB in line with these results. Luckily, jitter was low at 200ps maximum.	-80dB	4.6%	2.8%	2.2%
The budget 575 has limitations but it manages well enough in most areas considering price. NK	-100dB	-	31%	8.5%

Separation (1kHz)	107dB
Noise (IEC A)	-122dB
Dynamic range	106dB
Output	1.92V

Frequency response



Distortion



Frequency response (-1dB)		
CD	4kHz	21kHz
DVD-A	8kHz	33.5kHz
SACD	2Hz	32kHz
Distortion CD DVD SACD		

big bang theory



Amplifiers such as these are a dying breed. Whilst the specialist market is vibrant with integrats, the large Japanese manufacturers have largely moved to multichannel. So we should be grateful that Denon UK has decided to import the PMA-1500R II into the country, says Dominic Todd, as many countries do without it...

Effectively this is a reworking of Denon's established flagship stereo powerhouse. Those familiar with the old PMA-1500R will find the new version quite familiar.

The style is unmistakably Denon, and build quality is every bit as good as you'd expect from the brand, too. There are however a few signs of cost cutting, with the cheap, plasticky feeling control knobs being a particular let down. A typical characteristic of the Japanese 'superamp' has always been a generally high feature count, and here the PMA-1500R II doesn't disappoint. A remote control is standard more often than not these days, but try looking for a MM/MC phono stage, 2 sets of tape loops, a head-phone socket or separate record and

overhaul is said to make the unit more compatible with SACD and DVD-A. In other words, this is what other manufacturers might call a wideband product. With a claimed frequency response that now hits 100kHz it's hard to argue with them on that front. Although the unit's been modified, the basics remain the same. That means, twin power supply units in flux-leakage cancelling configuration – designed to reduce distortion, high current output devices and a dual-mono circuit topology with high and low level signal areas allocated separate PCBs.

The main output capacitors are good quality Nichicon "Gold Tune", and there are quality branded parts, such as Elna, wherever you look. Just as impressive is the damped lid,

has stacks of features, and the advantage of switchable Class-A operation. Roksan's Kandy III (£600) and Cyrus' revived 6vs (£600) are also both well worth considering.

SOUND QUALITY

The old PMA 1500 sounded powerful and punchy yet ultimately tonally grey – classic Japanese solid-state sound. Even with the raft of tweaks, the Mark II model sounds not too dissimilar. Listening to Daftpunk's 'Voyager' brought out both the good and the bad points. On the plus side the sound was punchy and hard-hitting. Bass reached down low, and had decent extension and control, too. There was a sharp transient attack and a dynamic response among the best in class. This bold sound equated to an equally strong sound stage. Only the Marantz PM7200KI can match the level of width and depth of staging even though, within the stage, the sound wasn't so well focused. The downside of all this was the Denon's slightly mechanical nature; while it really controlled the music well, it failed to let it flow.

Switching to a female vocalist (Anastacia's 'Left Outside Alone') made the balance more obvious. Whilst possessing good height and body within the sound stage, vocals sounded rather forward. That powerful bass was a touch too heavy and a tad slow on its feet. Still, the bass did at least deal well with the

"no one could accuse the PMA-1500R II of not being exciting to listen to..."

listen selectors and you're more likely than not to be disappointed: the Denon has them all, plus preamp outputs and loudness switch. As usual, the first is useful, the second useless.

Nothing has changed from the original 1500 on the outside then, but inside is a different matter. Although much looks the same, Denon has completely redesigned the volume, tone and power amplification circuits. The reason for the

shielded power supply and preamp sections and heatsink dampers. The last of these particularly impressed as the usual "ting" sound that you'd get from running your fingers across the top of the heatsink was completely missing. Small details, perhaps, but ones that could all make the difference, especially when one takes into account the Denon's rivals. The key competitor has to be Marantz's PM7200KI Signature (£500): A similarly powerful amp' which also

more subtle textures and colours of sound. No one could accuse the PMA-1500RII of not being exciting to listen to! With Keane's 'Everybody's Changing' the main vocalist was intimate and very present in the room. Again, there was a realistic sense of height to the singer, and excellent forward projection as well. Sadly, the same mechanical edge was also present and things, unfortunately, didn't get much better with the rest of the instruments.

Instrumental separation was only average and percussion rather summarised in general.

A change away from pop to jazz, and Ian Shaw's 'Ruby' suited the Denon better. Here the massive vocal presence was a little overblown, but did at least sound more natural than before. Although the tonality was superior I still did feel that the balance wasn't quite right. It was just too brash at times. Bass fans will, however, probably love this amp. The bass guitar had a real "club" sound – the kind of sound that rattles windows, teeth and beer bottles, and can be heard from several streets away. Percussion lacked a little decay and subtlety, although the fine definition shown by the acoustic guitar proved a pleasant surprise. All in all, it was certainly an exciting balance, but not exactly the most soothing...

Classical music showed that this amp wasn't so much music dependant as room and ancillary picky. In essence, the balance was just as it had been before. Interestingly, the wide frequency response did seem to pick up a little more hiss in the recording than I've noticed before: This is always the problem with wideband designs of course – open the window wider and you'll let more rubbish through! For all this openness however, things were never especially detailed. In fact, by contrast, it almost sounded veiled at times. As before, though, there could be no doubting the PMA-1500RII's scale or dynamic control. Both of these were first rate, and gave the music an exhilarating feel, if not quite the realism it deserved.

CONCLUSION

There's plenty to like about the range-topping Denon. It's



well made and specified, and sounds great fun. Put it in a really big room, with some smooth sounding ancillaries and it could be just the job. Yet, those looking for subtlety and insight from their music will be disappointed by the PMA-1500RII. Vocal distortion is the greatest letdown, and surprising from a company that makes the supremely well balanced PMA-255 and PMA-355. So this amplifier is for those who want big dollops of power and control – heavy rock or techno listeners – rather than jazz or classical listeners. Still, given some deft system and ancillary matching, I can see it having something for them too – great value, but handle with care...

VERDICT ●●●●

Vast, powerful sound that's suitable for large rooms and big music, but needs smooth sounding ancillaries to really sing.

DENON PMA-1055R11 £499.99
 Denon UK
 ☎ +44 (0)1274 741 200
 www.denon.co.uk

- FOR**
- superb power and control
 - excellent feature count
 - solid build
- AGAINST**
- lacks tonal colour
 - can sound harsh
 - needs careful matching

THE 'BUDGET SUPER INTEGRATED' STORY

There have always been Japanese 'superamps' but probably their greatest moment, at least in the budget sector, came in the early 1990s. It all began in the autumn of 1990 when both the Pioneer A400 and Marantz PM40SE were launched. A year or so later they were both joined by the Sony TAF-540E. Between them, they formed a formidable trio that did much to shake up the UK amplifier industry. Of all the three, it's the A400 that's still the most famous. Pretty much every reviewer raved about its clarity, focus and extraordinary ability to perform with ancillaries costing many times as much. It wasn't perfect – a slightly warm bass saw to that – but this certainly didn't stop it from becoming a huge sales success. Interestingly, it actually caused quite a stir within the retail market. Most specialist hi-fi stores weren't Pioneer stockists and, such was the demand, grew tired of customers asking for a product they didn't keep. This led to the Pioneer receiving a good deal of unnecessary bad mouthing from dealers, but also gave Marantz an added impudence. At launch the PM-40SE couldn't quite match the A400: It just didn't have the same level of resolution. It didn't take Marantz long, however, to come out with a solution. In the spring of 1991 they changed the output capacitors, upped the price by £10, and produced the PM-40SE MKII. The tweaks worked. It now almost matched the Pioneer for detail, but was more forgiving of ancillaries and had a greater sense of presence. Finally, there was the Sony TAF540E. Whilst it didn't get quite so much attention at the time, it was still a highly rated amp'. Although it didn't have the precision and analysis (mind you, nothing did at this price at the time) of the A400, it sounded a bit less uptight than the Pioneer occasionally could. It was also the most powerful of the three. Later versions of all three came and went, yet seemed to become progressively worse; it was just that our perceptions had changed and that the UK competition had caught up. Still, the fact remains that, even today, these are still three remarkably fine sounding amplifiers. For less than £100 apiece, they also make superb second-hand bargains.



MEASURED PERFORMANCE

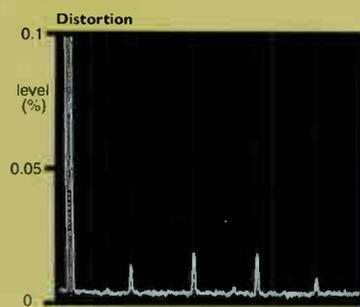
Surprisingly, this wasn't a zero distortion amplifier. The high current MOS (metal oxide silicon) output transistors appear to lack the open loop bandwidth of FETs, so distortion rises significantly toward high frequencies. Where midband distortion was a low 0.001%, at 10kHz this had risen to 0.012% into 8ohms and 0.03% into 4ohms. The figures come from a spread of harmonics up to 50kHz our analysis shows. Luckily amounts are low enough to be inaudible.

Power measured 112W into 8ohms and 122W into 4ohms, not so much considering the size and weight of this amplifier. Frequency response was wide enough for DVD-A and SACD, rolling off above 60kHz. Sensitivity is high at 180mV.

Both MM and MC phono stages are extremely quiet, likely using the latest super low noise ICs. Curiously, the MM stage is wideband, with full gain right down to 4Hz, so LP warps may be a problem, but the MC stage has a warp filter: It rolls off gain quickly below 14Hz (-14dB), producing around -6dB suppression at 4Hz. A small +0.5dB peak at 40Hz will add a little oomph to MC bass. With high sensitivity and ultra low noise the MC stage is tailored for low output, high quality MC cartridges.

Distortion figures suggest feedback has been limited in this amp. It's a highly crafted design in terms of the devices and circuits used, which delivers a precise set of results. NK

Power:	112watts
CD/tuner/aux:	
Frequency response	4Hz-61kHz
Separation	130dB
Noise	-105dB
Distortion	0.012%
Sensitivity	180mV
dc offset	2.73mV
Disc (MM)	
Frequency response	4Hz-60kHz
Separation	80dB
Noise	-85dB
Distortion	0.01%
Sensitivity	3mV
Overload	140mV
Disc (MC)	
Frequency response	14Hz-70kHz
Separation	81dB
Noise	-69dB
Distortion	0.01%
Sensitivity	0.2mV
Overload	13mV



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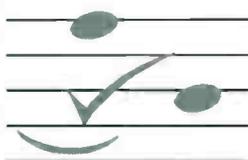
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spiral match

The vibrationally challenged Stewart Wennen tries out an extremely effective, yet keenly priced new system support from Spiralex...

Many expensive systems are placed on poor supports which are extremely deleterious to the sound, allowing all manner of air and structure-borne vibrations to spoil things. Even I've been guilty of this heinous crime – a few years ago my system was plagued with structure borne feedback due to my suspended floor, which shared both my loudspeakers and turntable. The solution was simple – I had to break the feedback loop, which I achieved by mounting my turntable on the wall. The improvements were dramatic, with more bass extension, cleaner midrange and breathtakingly clear treble reproduction, and even the size of the stereo image was improved.

Spiralex's Simon Carrington has been taking part in a research and development project for over twenty years concerning the isolation of system components from external vibrations. He's come up with a complex structure that is laminated from layers of aircraft plywood with a spiral construction between the laminations. Aircraft plywood is a delicate layer of timber that is up to 1mm in thickness, the spirals interspersed at regular intervals over the whole surface of the separate layers. Spiralex thus has very low mass in comparison to its volume, which bodes well for its performance as an isolating platform. This lack of mass and the type of construction enables the material to store very little energy, enabling the equipment to perform to the very best possible.

The Spiralex supports are available in two different types of package. First is a conventional board with three spikes to couple the support to the surface on which the board is placed, the dimensions of which are 440x320x35mm. Finish of the supports I was supplied with is a

sprayed lacquer over real timber, but black is also available. Simon also supplies small circular supports called Pucks, in sets of four, and these are only available in black. They measure 75x35mm and are supported on three stick-on rubber feet. The cost of these is £85 for a set of four, whilst the platform is £195 including VAT.

SOUND QUALITY

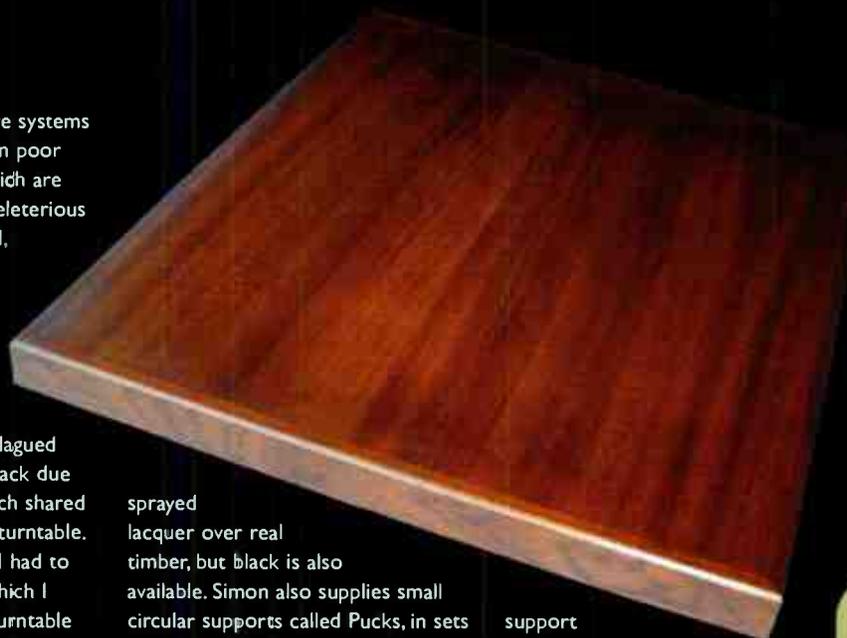
My first test was to replace my turntable platform with the Spiralex platform. My turntable platform is a support constructed from marine plywood, supported by three spikes. After levelling the platform my turntable was placed on top and re-levelled, and the first record started. There was a startling improvement; James Brown thundered into my living room with power and a precision I have rarely heard before.

The stereo image was much wider with a feeling of space around the musicians and the depth of the image was very nearly perfect. Orchestral music was also improved by the same amount of size in the perceived image. But this is not the whole story; bass instruments gained a feeling of size and were much more accurately reproduced, whilst the midrange seemed to be better focused. Treble registers were so good I almost wept at the sheer beauty of the performance!

The next test was to place my Compact Disc player atop the

support and listen to the differences. Immediately I noticed that the treble was a great deal smoother than before with very little "digital glare." Stereo imaging was again improved tremendously to the point of being at the performance. This was not an isolated incident but was evident on all of the discs put into the machine. Another test was to place one of my ageing Crown DC300A power amplifiers on the Spiralex Platform. Due to their age all of my Crowns buzz a little, but placed on the platforms the buzzing became almost inaudible. Next I tried the Pucks, and they were placed under the CD player and the machine started. These little things proved truly amazing, letting the music's emotion wash through my living room – great stuff.

Overall then, I can recommend heartily recommend all variants of the Spiralex platforms. The great thing is their value – they give exceptionally high performance at the price (as good as some far, far costlier stuff), are very well made, look great and are unusually affordable too.



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meixing it!

'Ming Da' wasn't a name we'd heard before, but the sheer beauty of Meixing' Electronics' MC-7R valve preamplifier and the 'direct-from-the-manufacturer' pricing of £288 was too enticing a prospect for John May to ignore...

This interesting preamp comes extremely well packed in a very sturdy cardboard box-within-a-box - if weight is any indicator of quality, then the Ming Da MC-7R is supreme at 9.5kg. The first thing that greets the user upon opening the first box is a pair of white cotton gloves. These are included to avoid spoiling the polished chrome appearance of the preamp or the included valves. It also brings a certain element of ritual to the proceedings - a nice touch in these 'plug & play' days! The supplied instructions were all in Chinese, but the inputs/outputs are all clearly labelled, so this shouldn't pose a problem.

The MC-7R is sturdily built with its black, satin-brushed aluminium 9mm thick front, and 3mm thick back panel. The chassis is manufactured from polished stainless steel, apparently chosen for its non-magnetic properties. The mains transformer with OFC windings is potted in a black crackle-finish enclosure situated at the rear of the pre. Valves of unknown original are supplied, but appear to be well-made items. According to their website their valves are manufactured in Russia, Czech and America. They only use valves that have been tested for over 100 hours. The double-triode compliment of 12AX7 and 12AU7 driver valves are visible at the front of the amp, with the 5Z3 rectifier valve positioned in the centre. The MC-7R preamp comes with four sets of inputs, and two sets of outputs should you wish to have it connected to two different systems. In common with many pre-amplifiers these days, there is no phono stage.

Lack of said phono stage does have its plus points in that there is more budget which can be allocated towards maximising the quality of the line stages. Users buying a preamp such as this are likely to choose their own separate phono stage anyway, so the omission is not a glaring one.

Unusually the gold-plated input sockets are positioned along the right-hand side of the pre-amp. Visually I think this spoils the appearance of the amp once all inputs are in use. Cunningly the unit is pictured without interconnects connected on the Meixing website! I would have preferred the input and output sockets to be at the rear. The reasoning behind this though is of achieving the shortest possible wiring between all the sockets and the internal components and valve bases inside the amp.

Internally the parts content is of a respectably high standard. Valve bases are all ceramic, silver-plated contact types. Capacitors are Solen polypropylenes, with high voltage Rubycon electrolytics for smoothing and cathode-bypass positions. Resistors are a mixture of 2w metal film and wire-wound types. Signal wiring is silver-plated copper. Lastly, the volume pot is the ever-green Alps

Blue. The unit is hard wired throughout which should aid in the sound quality stakes. Some capacitors are secured to the chassis with hot-melt glue, which should help in damping out any vibrations in the components that could degrade the sound. The negative side of this however is that components are slightly harder to upgrade/replace than usual. It is also difficult to unsolder and remove components without causing heat damage to neighbouring ones.

Generally speaking internal construction quality is reasonably good, though attention to minor details like neater soldering could be improved. Many of the connections appear hastily made and dirty, with loose strands of wire visible which had presumably been over-looked when the ends were tinned. This could potentially create a short especially between the connections on the valve bases, and is potentially very dangerous. This really lets down an otherwise fantastically screwed-together piece of equipment. Quality control could do with some improvement evidently...



SOUND QUALITY

Plugging the MC-7R into my system was straightforward enough. With great anticipation I inserted a CD into the drawer of my Rotel RCD-02, turned up the volume, and prepared to be transported to audio nirvana... You know, reality can be a real pain in the anode sometimes! I was greeted with music – yes - but also by a very loud buzzing noise emanating from my Mission M72's! Bugger! E-mails were exchanged between myself and MeiXing, who were very helpful indeed and concerned by this buzz. The preamp was taken off of the market until the problem could be traced. In the meantime there was some frenzied head scratching taking place within the World Audio Design forum! The problem was traced to the output impedance of the MC-7R, which was found to be too great for my rebuilt Quad 303 power amplifier, and was causing the buzz (thanks for solving that one Richard!). A couple of resistors inserted into the input of my 303 later, I was in business! MeiXing shall hopefully address this problem in the future.

I kicked off the listening session properly with Suede's 'Animal Nitrate' from their Singles collection CD. This recording can see me diving for the stop button when played on the wrong system, but thankfully the MC-7R and Quad 303 presented this rough recording in the best possible light. Guitars had body and substance to them, with the only distortion coming from the effects pedals and not from the system itself. The recording does err on the bright side, but the MC-7R faithfully transferred this to the Quad 303 without introducing any foibles of its own. Even with all the guitar-based grunge present in this recording, Brett Anderson's voice scythed clean through the mix sounding vital and life-like, positively commanding attention. This particular track can often sound flat and uninvolved, but here it sounded as fresh and exciting as the first time I heard it. Drums sounded somewhat submerged and indistinct however, though it didn't detract from the overall enjoyment of this piece. I found myself really paying attention to the lyrics for the first time in years. Certainly an impressive beginning for this pairing then!

Beck's 'Whiskeyclone, Hotel City 1997' from 1994's 'Mellow Gold' marked his first recording for a major record label, and you can sense the fun he had making it. The

MC-7R revealed the subtle layering of this song, and also some ambience and depth to the recording which came as a pleasant surprise. As was the case with Suede, this added a new found enjoyment to this well-played track. It's these subtle little cues you get from the ambience of a recording which allow you to guess how close Beck was to his microphone when this was recorded for example. It adds to the realism, and gets you closer to the music – surely what hi-fi is all about. The best complement I can give the Ming Da is that I ended up listening to this CD from start to finish, enjoying every minute of it! Full marks for foot tapping ability!

Moving into deeper musical waters, I inserted the 24-bit remastered soundtrack to John Williams' 'Jaws' into the drawer of my Rotel RCD-02. His recordings are always a superb test of dynamic ability, soundstaging, and tonal colour in particular. It was top marks for all three. The 'Main Title' had me nervously searching the floor for signs of anything grey and triangular traversing my floorboards! This track starts off quietly and ominously with its now famous opening bars. These notes growled out of the speakers with alarming primordial ferocity from a velvety-black background, which suggested the MC-7R was adding nothing in the way of noise, distortion or any obvious colouration. The dynamic range of this recording is a real roller-coaster ride, and this combination hang on for dear life, never once seeming to run out of control. Like the aftermath of the fair ride itself I was left breathless and shaken yet wanting more!

Though this soundtrack has a somewhat 'manufactured' soundstage due to the way it was originally mixed, instruments stayed firmly anchored (pun intended!) to their respective positions. There was a very well defined sense of perspective that allowed me to 'see' into the recording session. The mix is quite murky in places, but the MC-7R/303 managed to excavate a great deal of the detail

Whilst not a brand name that is familiar here yet, MeiXing is highly regarded by the international hi-fi community. Established in 1991, it has only recently begun to manufacture and sell products to the international market. The stated aim is to bring high quality sound to as many people as possible at a low price – a noble endeavour!

present in this recording. Tonal purity of violins in particular was quite superb. I have heard more detailed renditions of this CD in the past, but they've been at the expense of musical enjoyment. Here I wasn't left wanting for anything.

It would seem that the mixing of valve and solid-state technology pays off handsomely in the sound quality stakes, and is also a cost effective way of achieving a genuine high-end sound without the associated price tag. At this price there is no competition at all. There is a passive alternative in the shape of Creek's OBH-12 which is some £60 cheaper. However if we're talking about sheer value for money and outright sound quality then the MC-7R is the clear favourite.

I'm very excited by the products that are now steadily winding their way out of China at present. Given wider exposure by the hi-fi press I believe they have the potential to really shake things up over here, especially where value for money is concerned. The MC-7R really throws into stark relief some of the ridiculously over-priced equipment we've been led to believe equates with 'high-end' here in England. This preamp never once failed to impress, and was a pleasure to use. MeiXing, along with others, are sure to help establish China as a major player in the international audiophile arena, and I eagerly look forward to hearing more products from them in the near future.

VERDICT £

Superbly priced and voiced pre-amp that punches above its price range. Impressive build quality and looks. Genuine high-end sound on a budget!

MEIXING MC-7R £288

MeiXing Electronics Factory

☎ (0086) 7575 991363

www.meixingaudio.com

FOR

- revealing natural sound
- great looks and build
- price

AGAINST

- no phono stage
- power amplifier compatibility
- side mounted phonos

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Preamplifiers commonly have a gain of x3, from CD input to line output. The Ming Da offers more, x10, so to deliver 1V to a power amp it needs 100mV in - a relatively high sensitivity. There are no drawbacks to this, since being a valve preamp it will swing 40V out, four times more than most transistor jobbies. The volume control will need to be set quite low, but as it is backed off input overload sets the signal handling limit and this was greater than 6V, measurement revealed. It's more than enough for all modern sources.

Bandwidth extended from 20Hz up to a very high 150kHz, within 1dB limits. Below 2GHz there was a sudden and steep rise in gain to +10dB at 2Hz, possibly due to the way feedback has

been applied. It wasn't a good sign but the Ming Da seemed stable and able to cope. I strongly suspect this will add a sense of depth or power to the sound, perhaps enhancing 'atmosphere', due to emphasis of subsonic aural cues. Distortion and noise levels were satisfactorily low.

The Ming Da measures well, but its subsonic gain peak will influence the sound. NK

Frequency response	20Hz-150kHz
Separation	107dB
Noise	-88dB
Distortion	0.14%
Sensitivity	100mV
gain	x10
overload	>6V in / 40V out

togetherness



Amity is a German company with a growing reputation for its keenly priced audiophile electronics; Channa Vithana auditioned its HPA1C and HPA4S headphone amplifiers...

It's always nice to find interesting, leftfield specialist hi-fi manufacturers, and sweeter still when they opt not to charge telephone number price tags for their wares. Amity is just such a company – it makes quite a large range of audiophile electronics, none of which follow traditional Teutonic aesthetic imperatives. These are starkly, simply styled things with none of the visual ostentation you see from certain German specialist audio names...

The HPA1C and HPA4S headphone amplifiers share identical aluminium casework. The central body is made of two part extruded anodised silver sections joining very elegantly with a subtly overlapped seam along both sides. The finish of the main case is superb, with a smooth feel, and variations in the extrusions lend it a sophisticated look while also acting as a heatsink. The front and rear panels and volume knobs are made from natural aluminium, and are noticeably less well finished than the casing – it would have been preferable if they too were anodised. This is because anodised aluminium has superior aesthetics and for practical reasons is a good solution for longevity, being more resistant to wear and tear than either bare 'mill' finish or powder coating. The front plate uses a tightening mesh spacer between its

four long hex head bolts and the main case, leaving a small unsightly gap (with mesh spacer exposed) which isn't ideal – it would have been better to have the gap at the rear where it is less visible.

Both amps have individual volume controls for left and right channels and very solid, braced 1/2 inch stereo jack sockets, the cheaper HPA1C having green LEDs while the HPA4S has a fetching set of blue LEDs to indicate operation. For both models I had no problems adjusting the volume using two knobs and this is also a useful feature for an accurate balance control negating the complexity and inferior sound of a separate balance control within the circuit. Some volume position markings would make it a more practical proposition though. However, Amity makes an HPA6S, which is identical in specification and price to the HPA4S but only has the single volume knob. These volume knobs are nowhere near as well executed in use compared to the weighty damped precision of the rival Creek headphone amp, feeling crude in comparison.

At the rear, both models feature an IEC socket to upgrade mains cables, power switch and a single pair of extremely high quality phono input sockets. These are braced with spacers on the outside of the casework making for a pleasing

solidity and construction that smoothly accepting interconnects. There are four rubber feet at the base, which is a good idea as they stop the unit from slipping, very useful for reviewing and if you use heavy and stiff interconnects! Both came with 850mm lengths of Amity DAK2 interconnects, which are a multi stranded braided type with good quality gold plated phono connectors. The HPA1C and HPA4S measure 110x62x200mm and weigh 1kg each.

The HPA1C is Amity's entry-level headphone model, said to be ideal for use with computer sound cards (using the CADAPT phono to 3.5mm adapter) as well as connecting to line sources such as CD/DVD players. It is a very quiet amplifier – both when playing music and just switched on without signal. Indeed it is not as susceptible to the vagaries of mains snap, crackle and pop as my own reference Musical Fidelity X-CANS v2, while being very close to silent. It has a pleasing musical quality expressing a generally neutral spectrum, easily outperforming the valve driven X-CANS – the differences being higher resolution with vocals and bass in particular, the MF sounding woolly in comparison; a little more upbeat but ultimately rougher. This was evident on Tony James's bass lines for 'Doctor Jeep' from 'Vision Thing' by The Sisters of

Mercy, where the HPA1C produced a fluid, almost ephemeral bass line, which is vital to the song's structure that otherwise would have sounded even more processed than it already does. The MF had a louder though less tuneful bass, emphasising it more in the mix.

The HPA4S is a higher spec model, and also features 'Class A' operation but this time each channel has a short circuit-proof transformer for complete double mono, symmetrical, internal power. It runs noticeably warmer to the touch than the HPA1C. It is also available with a black anodised body – HPA4X. The HPA4S's sound quality effortlessly exceeds the already good HPA1C. Vocal expression is far superior,

when comparing the two models - on the HPA4S, Andrew Eldritch's unique baritone vocal on 'You Don't See Me' and 'More' from 'Vision Thing' gains a textural and sophisticated quality communicating whispered hushed tones as well as his trademark growl with equal aplomb. While Paul Simon's voice on 'Graceland' also benefits, adding a sad and reflective quality missing with the HPA1C, 'I



AMITY HPA1C SPECIFICATIONS [QUOTED]:
Output Power/Channel: 1.6 watt on 30 ohm
Input Impedance: 30K ohm minimum
Channel Separation: >90dB
Signal To Noise: >96dB
Distortion at 100 ohm 0dB: <0.01 100 ohm impedance
Frequency response +/- 1dB: 10Hz-100kHz

TOTALLY WIRED

The supplied Amity DAK2 interconnect wasn't in the same league as my more expensive Chord Co. Chameleon 2 Silver Plus or the Kontak Link 507 references. Though lacking resolution, the Amitys were smooth sounding, which was good, but they had a stronger bass presence, which was detrimental - being dominant. However considering they were supplied with the Amity electronics free of charge, they are an excellent step up from the cheap and nasty cable that comes as standard with other manufacturers' products. For this Amity must be highly commended!

my recommendation despite the higher price tag (28 Euros extra!) Both present obviously superior sound to my 'old faithful' MF X-CANS v2, while the HPA4S just edges ahead of the Creek OBH21-SE on sonics. Still, the Creek offers extra features, is better built and finished and is a more practical proposition if you don't require a balance control. As always, you pay your money and takes your choice – but don't ignore these excellent, characterful bits of kit!

VERDICT ●●●●£

Both Amity headphone amplifiers offer superb value for money, allied to great sound and quirky styling.

AMITY HPA1C	£288.00
AMITY HPA4S	£316.00
Anderson Electronic	
☎ +0049 (0) 7134-1348-01	
www.amity-hifi.de	

- FOR**
- high resolution sound
 - fine build
 - anodised aluminium bodies
- AGAINST**
- front plate finish
 - no volume markings

Know What I Know' has a mixture of vocals, highly saturated drum track and chiming guitars - all which were conveyed with a very pleasing and highly resolved quality in compared to the HPA1C.

Comparing the HPA4S to the Creek OBH21-SE was very interesting considering their different respective design approaches. They were both remarkably similar, being well behaved, of high resolution throughout the frequency range and never over smooth or dull. However there are slight differences in certain aspects. The Creek has a tighter, more controlled sound being marginally less fluid as well as slightly better bass extension.

CONCLUSION

Both Amity headphone amps are highly enjoyable hi-fi instruments, with a pleasingly lush sound quality. The HPA4S is really superb, being

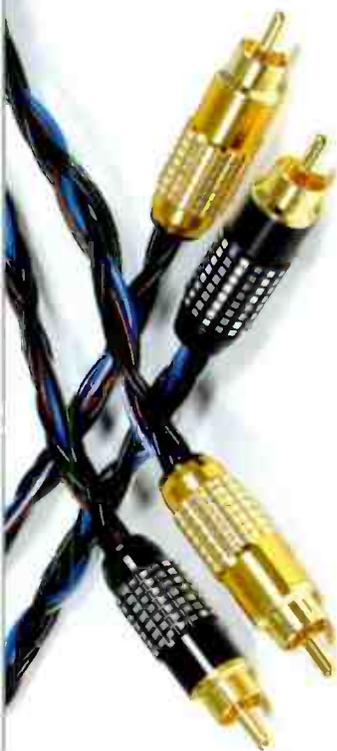
CREEK OBH21-SE

This £250 rival features a similar method of construction to the Amitys, with central body and front/ rear plates using aluminium. It differs in having a thicker silver aluminium front plate surround extending beyond the casework, two headphone jack output sockets and pre-outs at the rear. The amp's circuitry features an upgrade over the previous Creek OBH-11 by replacing the discrete transistors with high grade integrated circuits and professional standard Op Amps along with a split power supply which allows circuits to be DC coupled and to eliminate capacitors. The SE variant is an higher performing version of the standard OBH21 with improved internal components and a substantial external, regulated OBH-2 DC power supply connected to the rear with a small 2.1mm power jack.

SPECIFICATIONS [quoted]:
Output Power: 10mW into 30 to 300 ohm loads
Impedance: 30 to 300 ohms
THD: < 0.005% at 1kHz
Signal To Noise: 70dB

REFERENCE SYSTEM:

- Marantz DV8400 DVD universal player
- Creek OBH21-SE headphone amplifier
- Musical Fidelity X-CAN v2 headphone amplifier
- Sennheiser HD650 headphones, Cardas headphone cable
- Chord Company Chameleon 2 Silver Plus interconnect
- Kontak Link 507 interconnect



cooler lumpsum?

Malaysians are famous for their love of hi-fi. Now, thanks to Euphonic Research, they are hoping to compete in the manufacturing process too. Dominic Todd is first to listen to the arrestingly styled new hybrid ATT-600/AMP pre-power amplifier combo, which promises 'superfi' sound at mere 'high end prices'...

There's very little that looks like Euphonic Research's ATT-600/AMP-80 amplifiers. They use merbau hard wood fascias and are adorned with locally mined pewter badges. The stepped attenuator preamp takes the wood theme one stage further with wooden volume and selector knobs. Whatever your opinion of the aesthetics is, you can't deny that the effect is striking.

Harder to justify, however, is the finish. For this price, customers really would expect better. The preamp's lid, for example, sat proud of the fascia, was fixed by large, ugly bolts and finished in an unattractive "orange peel" paint finish. The rather cheap looking display didn't help matters either. With the power amp, it was the heatsinks that, I felt, let the design down. Although large in surface area, the construction simply looks and feels cheap, especially when most rivals use intricately diecast alloys. Perhaps most bizarre of all was that both units feature captive mains-leads. If ER wants to really capture the audiophile market this is the first thing they should change.

It's a shame the ER's external finish is so crude, as the internal

electronics are both intriguing and, by and large, well done. The AMP-80 power amp is of a hybrid design. Essentially it's a minimalist two-stage design with an initial valve voltage gain stage driving a hybrid bipolar/ MOSFET output stage. To avoid using an electrolytic capacitor the Single Ended 6922, Electro-harmonix, valve is battery biased. The power supply is also regulated, with the quest being a further reduction of noise. The transistor output boards are split into the two channels and are attached directly to each heatsink. The bipolar/ MOSFET hybrid utilises Japanese transistors and third generation HEXFETs to give zero negative feedback. Component quality is high with thick solid core signal cables, military grade PCBs, gold-plated valve socket and bamboo separators in the power supply, just a few of the highlights.

Component quality is similarly high in the ATT-600. Metal film resistors, solid core wiring and a silver-plated, board mounted, selector switch all show real attention to detail. The most notable feature is the discarding of the conventional volume potentiometer or chip for an attenuation system that switches high quality resistors, using gold-plated relays, directly into and out of the signal path. The downside of this is a rather annoying, and loud, clicking sound as the volume control is turned! The five main inputs are passive, but ER has also provided a single active (buffered) input for older, lower output, components. Both units are intriguingly designed and true advocates of the short signal path. From a users point of view, however, the inclusion of a remote control would have perhaps been desirable, especially as most rivals now feature this.

With a combined price of

£3,600, rivals aren't exactly hard to come by. This kind of money would buy Unison Research's, pure triode, 24 Watts, S8 (£3,350). Furthermore, Pathos' highly regarded TT R.R. is also barg on the money at £3,595, and for only a little more (£4,156), EAR's sublime 864/S34 can't be ruled out either.

SOUND QUALITY

From the Euphonic Research's specification it's clear that a balance between the best of valves and transistors has been sought and, by and large, this is exactly what has been achieved. Despite its rather eclectic makeup, with Natasha Bedingfield's 'Size Matters' the ER combo managed to sound remarkably cohesive. As you'd expect from a single ended design, the sound was beautifully refined, with well-articulated vocals and fine layering of instruments. As you'd also expect from a single-ended design, MOSFETs or not, bass wasn't especially deep or extended. It was, however, immensely tuneful with excellent control and timing. Clearly, then, the hybrid nature of the amp was having the desired effect.

When it came to staging the ER generally impressed, yet it wasn't quite as expansive as some. Perhaps it's unfair to compare the AMP-80 with monster power amps such as the CAV A10, but it can't be denied that, good projection aside, there wasn't that vast sweep of sound that characterises some of the competition. I was further reminded of the ER's bass limitations when it came to listening to the Shapeshifter's 'Lola's Theme'. Generally, the sound was punchy and had good transient attack. What was missing, though, was the sheer bass presence of rival CAV and ECS bruisers. Nevertheless, this was counted by a sense of openness that

THE COMPANY

Euphonic Research was founded in 1997 by Malaysian, Dr Teck Wong. Rather than pursuing medicine, Dr Wong decided to follow his passion for hi-fi, and spent the next five years researching all aspects of musical reproduction. Within the CyberJaya district – the Malaysian equivalent of Silicon Valley – Euphonic Research has greatly benefited from MSC (Multimedia Super Corridor) status. Essentially, this is a government backed incentive award, and brings with it the close cooperation of multinational corporations. Access to their research laboratories has allowed Euphonic Research to test a wide range of componentry, and explains the unusual and eclectic choice of components and audio engineering.

none of these heavyweights could match. It managed to reproduce that single-ended trick of allowing the listener to hear right through to the heart of the music, and revealing much of the music's texture and detail in the process. To further allure the listener, timing was excellent, with the combo having the rare ability to pick up a rhythm and run with it. Unlike some pure single-ended valve amps, the treble wasn't overly smooth, but had good bite, without sounding at all forced or hardened.

The Divine Comedy's 'Charmed Life' was presented with a super resolution of both vocals and piano. Stage positioning was good, although not quite as pin-sharp as some. That said, the projection of, and insight into, Hannon's vocals was first rate. Once again, there were times when I did feel there to be a lack of bass presence, and the brass section could perhaps have done with a tad more rasp, but these weren't enough to spoil a generally fine performance. For string timbre and percussion decay, the AMP-80 and ATT-600 were certainly up there with the best. Throughout listening to the Euphonic Researches I was aware of a compromise of technology, but a finely balanced compromise nevertheless. This was certainly the case with David Bowie's classic

'Moonage Daydream'. Although the percussion had fine attack, and the electric guitar a suitable zest, the backing orchestra was commendably smooth and cohesive sounding. It wasn't quite the most exciting of performances, but it was one that allowed you to appreciate the music and the recording for all its intricacies and nuances.

Listening to Finzi's 'Love's Labour's Lost', I was finding that the ER's presentation is one that grows on the listener. It may lack the instant gratification of some of its bolder rivals, but there's little doubting its ability to beguile the listener in the longer run. 'Love's Labour's Lost' was a fine example of this as, at first, I was slightly disappointed by the lack of scale and authority in the pieces introduction. The timpani drums didn't quite thunder as they should, either. Yet after a period of listening, one couldn't help but be captivated by the mellifluous, fluid string tone and finally handled brass that, even at medium to high volumes, refused to harden. In short, the ATT-600 and AMP-80 combo managed very much to live up to their name and sound, well, euphonic! Another aspect of the sound that became very apparent during Classical music was just how quiet the background noise was. Clearly, ER's exhaustive efforts to reduce noise have paid off...

CONCLUSION

I have to admit that the Euphonic

Research combo didn't get off to the best of starts. As first impressions go, this amp' is something of a disappointment. Presentationally, the design has some way to go, and the initial sonics aren't that exciting either. What the ER needs, however, is more than just a quick ten-minute blast in the dealer dem' room. Give it some time, and over the course of an extended listening period you'll really begin to appreciate the finer points of the design. As a marriage between the rhythm and pace of a good transistor design with the openness and texture of a fine single-ended valve amp', the ER works brilliantly. It might not have quite the bass weight or extension of some, so 'speaker matching needs more care than usual, but the cohesion with which the two technologies fuse takes some beating at this price. Get past the awkward looks and this is one amplifier combo that deserves a demonstration; just make sure it's a long one!

VERDICT ●●●●●

Wonderful fusion between the best of valve and transistor technologies. Unusual looks, but finish disappoints.

EUPHONIC RESEARCH ATT-600/ AMP-80 £2998.00

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www.euphonicresearch.com

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 - successful valve/ transistor marriage

- AGAINST**
- disappointing finish
 - not for bassheads!
 - captive mains leads

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

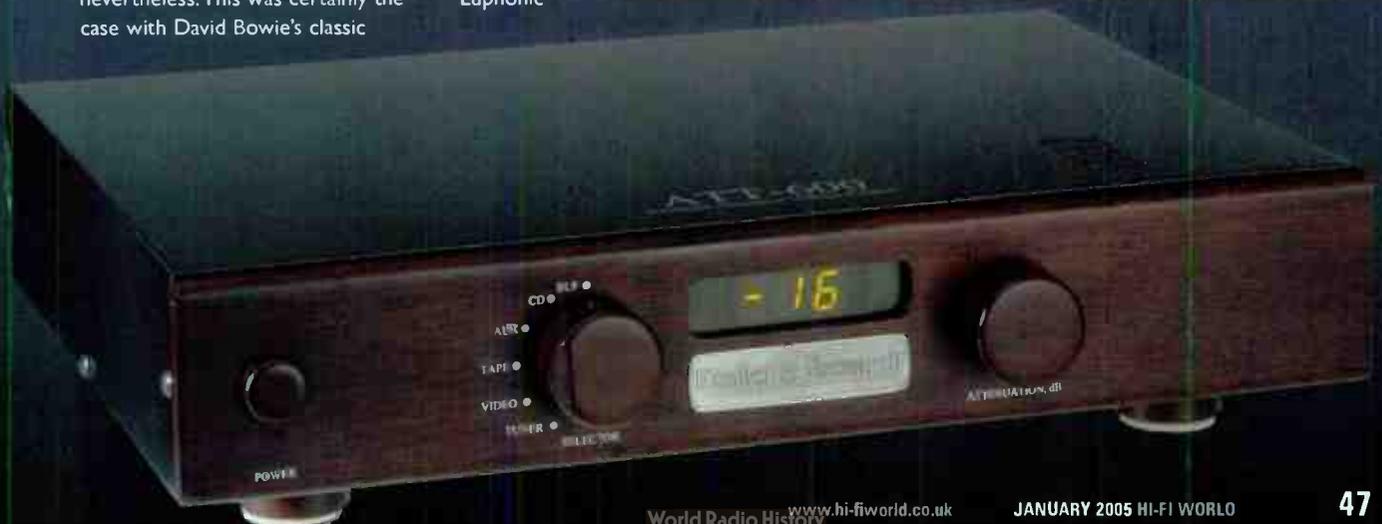
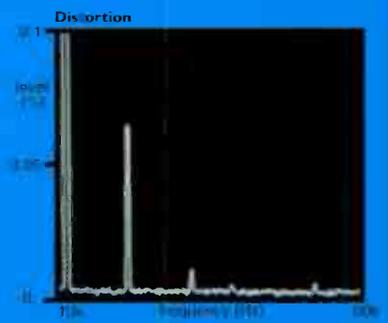
I suspect the idea here is to emulate the distortion pattern of a valve amp., since the Euphonic produces almost pure second harmonic distortion. The presence of second harmonic doesn't give a valve amp its sound, but low feedback avoids complex changes in distortion pattern and the Euphonic Research mimics this characteristic well. With low but steady levels of second harmonic at all levels and frequencies this amp exhibits a stable transfer function. There are no high order harmonics either, another good sign. This is a nice stable amp. It produces 40W into 8ohms and 64W into 4ohms - not vast amounts of power but plenty enough to go loud with modern, sensitive loudspeakers.

Input sensitivity is very low at 1.2V, but bandwidth normal enough at 18Hz-60kHz, wider than most valve amps.

The Euphonic amplifier measures well and should sound smooth, but

volume will need to be cranked up. NK

Power	40watts
CD/tuner/aux.	
Frequency response	18Hz-60kHz
Separation	107dB
Noise	-110dB
Distortion	0.06%
Sensitivity	1.17V
dc offset	1mV





Rich-er sounds

These days, where else can you get a high technology, hand crafted loudspeaker without a telephone number price tag, but from Castle Acoustics? Channa Vithana celebrates its affordable new Richmond 3i standmounter...

Castle Acoustics Ltd. is a well-established British loudspeaker manufacturing company with a long heritage of bespoke craftsmanship going as far back as 1973. Their speakers are physically characterised by excellent build quality and superb finish, especially their high quality veneer applications. They have latterly been synonymous for their proprietary woven carbon fibre mid/bass drive units combining modern technology and traditional craftsmanship with ease. In fact Castle is one of the few loudspeaker manufacturers today that can engineer crossovers, fabricate cabinets/drive units and assemble complete speakers 'in house'!

Although the Richmond has been in production for nearly twenty years through its various iterations, the new £320 3i marks something of a departure. After the company's

previous designer retired, Castle has used the skills of Karl-Heinz Frank for this new one. It sports a larger cabinet to allow improved bass response and better alignment which is made from 15mm MDF, veneered on both sides.

Castle calls this process 'balanced' veneer, where the internal planes of the cabinet are also veneered for sound quality reasons. It uses 'true' internal veneer because the company claims using paper, as many companies do, "doesn't sound as good". This is an elegant engineering solution to prevent panel inconsistencies, akin to laminating long thick lengths of timber with thinner staggered shorter layers for strength preventing warping and physical distortions, ensuring a constant planar surface therefore assisting consistent sound characteristics within the cabinet. The cabinet also contains bituminous pads to

reduce coloration and character and 'Bonded Acrylic Fibre' for acoustically consistent internal damping.

Castle's lovely little 130mm carbon fibre mid/ bass unit has a couple magnet for the 3i, while its chassis is a cast aluminium unit preferred for its rigidity and non-ferrous quality over plastic and steel derivatives. According to Castle the use of the aluminium chassis also minimises constrained dynamics and "signal induced flux modulation". The tweeter is a 19mm 'low-modulus polyamide-domed' type used for "improved sensitivity and consistency". The crossover has been revised with improvements for the bass and tweeter sections. For bass, second order four layer voice coil and simple RC network are used, claimed to give superior drive unit integration, with large silicon steel laminated core inductor chosen for best 'flow' and 'feel' to the bass and

midrange respectively. For treble two polypropylene film capacitors are used in parallel where "choosing two of dissimilar value seems to reduce the sonic signature of the cap", says Castle.

The cabinets follow the modern design ratio of narrow baffle and deeper cabinet, measuring 330x170x230mm, and weigh 3.9kg. There's a selection of different veneers: Cherrywood, Maple, Natural Oak, Walnut, Black Oak, Antique Oak, Mahogany and Santos Rosewood. They're superbly constructed and executed, and as expected given Castle's artisan pedigree, the Santos Rosewood veneer is flawless, smooth to the touch without any rough joints near the cut outs for the drivers or the cabinet's right angles. The mid/bass unit is situated above the tweeter and uses attractive allen-head fixings, however I would have preferred to see these used for the tweeter attachments as well, instead Castle have chosen to apply three visually less desirable wood screws here.

At the rear are a small port and two sets of high quality multi-way gold-plated binding posts enabling biwiring/ biamping. If single wiring, Castle recommend replacing the single wire linking on the binding posts with short leads made up from your preferred speaker cable and to connect from the amp to the top two connectors. For biwiring/ biamping they recommend using two sets of identical good quality cable if funds permit, otherwise just use one superior set instead of two inferior types.

SOUND QUALITY

I used Spiritualized 'Let it Come Down', Erasure 'Hits' and Tony Bennett & KD Lang's 'A wonderful World' to put the 3i through its paces. Castles of yore were known for their smooth sound quality, being refined but with a tendency for politeness, so it was quite a surprise that the 3is sounded somewhat different! Being multi-layered gospel driven psychedelic rock, 'Let It Come Down' is quite a handful, having a bright though excellent production, it can easily overwhelm a system coming across as cacophonous. Subsequently I was pleasantly surprised that the 3is handled the various organs, electric guitars, gospel singers and singer J Spaceman's desolate vocals with superb ability.

What the 3is released was a near-perfect, super-slick drive unit

"the Castles far surpassed my expectations of a budget loudspeaker"

integration, with the speaker cabinets disappearing entirely without any localised sound directivity problems. This is a good thing, because it shows a level of sophistication missing in a speaker at this price, while not succumbing to the modern speaker trap of being over refined and bass heavy simply to impress for a speaker of its size. This slick integration continued with the easier electronic pop of 'A Little Respect' and 'Blue Savannah' from Erasure, melding the superb synth production with Ancy Bell's nervous and emotional vocal style by way of a wonderfully brittle caramel-like quality.

The Tony Bennett and KD Lang disc was delivered with requisite lush and warm orchestration without strangling out the higher frequency string section. The vocals were first rate, being extended out with emotional dexterity into the room while the music was allowed to flow within its easy-listening genre with good timing, which again is undoubtedly due to the 3is superior driver integration. The bass dexterity was also good, easily extending beyond my reference R852/MDs - which isn't hard - however where the 3is diverted from the polite, modern speaker norm is that it was able to reproduce the bass tunelessly as well as extending it - no mean feat.

This is very important, as just deep extended bass is not good enough because after the immediacy of the extra bass has faded, there is a large gap where its tunefulness should be! I wish some modern speaker manufacturers would take note of this because it is to Castle's credit that they managed an above average sophistication for the low frequency spectrum without having to go for the deepest bass possible at the expense of everything else. The treble was not unruly or excessively forward either, once more,

against modern speaker practice, effortlessly handling the varying music with appropriate levels of attack and textural ability without resorting to shrillness.

CONCLUSION

The Castles far surpassed my expectations of a modern budget speaker. They can do fast thrilling rock like Spiritualized, Erasure's propulsive synth pop and lush yet expressively deep orchestration as on the Tony Bennett/KD Lang piece without fuss or a tell-tale signature character. They have a wonderfully natural integrated sound, which has to be down to the superb application of the overall design of the drive units, crossover and cabinet construction. They manage an alive and animated sound, being enthusiastic yet neither harsh nor shrill unlike some modern speakers. Additionally they are not merely politely suitable for just jazz/classica, like some of Castle's forbears either. The 3is were almost the equals of my super-clear MA R852s in the treble and mid regions, while surpassing them by behaving in an altogether more neutral manner, which is most impressive considering the complexities of their construction. A great British budget loudspeaker.

PLACEMENT

I found these speakers relatively unfussy regarding placement, sounding entirely agreeable sitting directly atop bookshelves in a small 3 x 2.5m office. Or for serious extended listening on birch ply stands in a 4.5 x 6.5m room: concrete walls and floor and floating laminate flooring. They worked best firing straight ahead spaced 2.4m apart and placed between 300-400mm away from rear walls for superior bass delineation and room integration; this goes against NK's recommendation [see MEASURED PERFORMANCE]!

VERDICT

Sensational sound, thanks to modern drivers and traditional construction methods, makes this a brilliant budget buy.

CASTLE RICHMOND 3i £320

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AGAINST

- nothing!

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

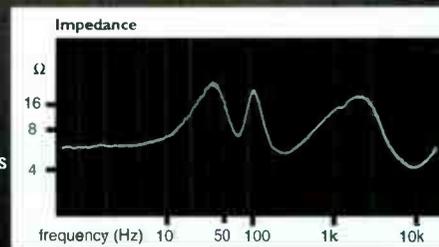
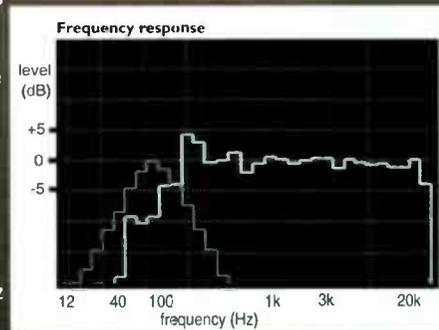
Castle usually prefer to ensure their speakers exhibit a little sonic warmth, by rolling down treble; the Richmond 3 makes no attempt at this. It has an almost ruler flat frequency response, our analysis shows, from 250Hz up to 16kHz. As a result it should sound clean and colouration free, as well as tonally balanced. Unlike other Castles I doubt there will be much sense of warmth in the sound.

Below 250Hz there's a fairly pronounced lift in bass output. Below 125Hz though, low frequency output rolls down steeply, as the port - tuned to 80Hz - takes over. This suits near-wall mounting, but even with the small boost this gives to bass the Richmond 3 still looks as if it will sound well damped and perhaps dry in bass delivery, rather than boomy and fulsome.

With an impedance that hovers around 8ohms but fails to 5.3ohms minimum the speaker is a light load. Sensitivity was good at 87dB

for one nominal watt (2.8V) of input.

The Richmond 3 measures well. It's an accurate carbon-fibre bookshelf design and as such looks very interesting. NK



civil society

The spiritual successor to the BC1, Spendor's S6e is one of the most accomplished 'affordable high end' loudspeakers to emerge from this country in the past decade, says David Price...

Can one ascribe national characteristics to hi-fi products? Well, just as German cars are extremely well engineered but largely devoid of character and Italian ones pretty to a fault but often flaky, I truly believe that Spendor's S6e loudspeaker couldn't come from any other nation but this. Interesting is the fact that Philip Swift is now at the helm of Spendor. He's the quiet, affable and down to earth man who's most famous for his range of electronics that took the nineties hi-fi scene by storm – Audiolab. There's a lot of that company's philosophy in this speaker. It's conscientiously and thoroughly engineered (with lots of impressive detail touches), gracefully styled (by Allen Boothroyd - the man behind Meridian's arresting visual language) and sober yet immensely capable sounding (more so, I reckon, than any Audiolab product ever was).

The cabinets don't attempt any fancy curvatures (real or imagined – as certain sleekly radiused designs are boxes inside!). Rather, they're robustly put together, beautifully veneered and conventionally shaped affairs, housing a tweeter and mid/bass unit, and a clever downward firing port. The drive unit complement comprises a 180mm bass-mid drive unit and 27mm tweeter. The former SD-18A driver sports a new polymer (ep38) cone, claimed to have a high stiffness to mass ratio whilst providing excellent internal damping properties. A profiled phase plug is claimed to improve linearity and dispersion characteristics compared to a conventional dustcap. Both the pole plate and top plate are black plated to draw heat away from the voice

coil, which increases the dynamic range and headroom of the bass unit by reducing thermal compression distortion, and there's a non-resonant, profiled, high rigidity cast aluminium alloy chassis.

The Spendor 27mm tweeter sports a brand new Sonolex material claimed to have a very low density whilst providing excellent internal damping properties and highly consistent performance. The crossover boasts low-loss components with OFC copper wire-wound inductors with cores and flanges manufactured from high purity compressed iron powder bonded with small amounts of isolating material. These alternative magnetic materials are said to achieve very high saturation levels and very linear magnetic characteristics even at large operating currents. Polypropylene capacitors and high power ceramic resistors are used, the latter only in parallel damping applications, so there are no series gain adjustment resistors – Spendor claiming that resistor non-linearity and dynamic compression effects are eliminated. All level adjustment within the crossover is achieved with tapped inductor 'auto-transformers' which are designed and manufactured in-house by Spendor.

SOUND QUALITY

As I said in the preamble, plug the S6es into your system and the chances are you might be just a tad underwhelmed. These are the least 'showy' sounding loudspeakers I've heard that have been designed in the last two decades. The likes of Mission have set a precedent in speaker voicing which gives a bright, bold and commanding sound that's brilliant in the showroom (I call in evidence the

782SE, your honour) yet can be less than easy to live with. These

Spendors are the opposite. Listened to cold, and with little attention paid to matching, placement or set-up, they're simply a tad over warm and lacklustre. Half an hour spent moving them around, getting the cables and/or source components right and the spines nicely bedded in – and the picture changes profoundly.

I used the S6es with Musical Fidelity amplification – both the X-P200s in monobloc mode and the

ticed tonality of the mid-bass unit.

Move to some acoustic jazz from Miles Davis ('So What') and these loudspeakers truly excel – as they're able to demonstrate their excellent tonal accuracy. Double bass sounds like double bass, trumpets like trumpets, hi-hats like hi-hats. You don't get the impression that you're listening to a tonally dry loudspeaker that's been voiced that way to give it speed. To its eternal credit, the S6e takes you closer to the respective textures of the different instruments.

It might seem actually it's barely an issue at all even at this price) and the whole is even greater than the sum of the parts. This loudspeaker is brilliantly integrated and remarkably cohesive (even at high volumes – it only gets shouty when you're putting hundreds of watts into it) and always seems so together – rhythmically, texturally and tonally. So well integrated and harmonious are its respective bits that its failings (and every speaker has them, ok yes) almost never intrude.

CONCLUSION

So I liked it – does it show? Here's a brilliant music making package. Its cool, even and refined balance makes it best with acoustic jazz and classical music – but it's so well designed that it will happily play rock or electronica with the same insouciance. Whatever you listen to, this is loudspeaker that's capable far beyond its price and should delight all corners. Truly, the best of British.

yet still maintains an impressive turn of speed. Likewise, its stereo imaging is never less than excellent – generally instruments hang back behind these boxes, but the S6e can't half push a solo instrument or lead vocal out into the room when called upon so to do. And whenever this is, you just know it's not going to hurt...

Dynamics are excellent too – although it lacks sledgehammer bass and the ability to move vast amounts of air, it never sounds strained or compressed. The kW500 gave it a right pummeling, and the S6e never really complained. Of course, you'll find more physically commanding designs, but not at (or near) this price. And all the time, its innate musicality shone through. It truly sang with my tube amp at lowish volume levels but I couldn't help but get the impression that this floorstander likes a good, clean, powerful transistor amplifier to 'bring it out of itself'.

The downsides of the S6e are few. Treble is just a tad veiled – it doesn't have the sheen and almost ethereal spaciousness of a good ribbon tweeter, such is that fitted to Elac's FS207.2. Nor does the bass have the motive power of rival floorstanding designs – with a razor-sharp 'on-off' feel. This is actually less of the problem than

mighty kW500 – plus my beloved tweaked World Audio K5881 tube power amp (with MF Audio Passive Pre). With QED XT-400 loudspeaker cables and the S6es about 30cm to the rear wall, they sang. Or rather they didn't – what they did do was provide an extremely even-handed and open window on the music with none of the dry, acerbic, forward, distortion-fuelled zing of so many other rivals. Nor did they serve up bass boom that apparently adds weight but in truth kills speed – despite their innate warm-side-of-neutral tonality, they never sounded slow or ponderous. What they offer is an unusual – almost unique, even – combination of speed, grip and transparency allied to most 'benevolent' tonality (they're not going to strip your paint, or rebores your inner ear canals...)

Somewhat mischievously, I decided to kick off the listening session with Inner City's 'Good Life', a classic house tune from 1988 and most certainly not what many – I suspect – Spendor customers would naturally listen to. The S6e surprised with an extremely engaging and musically satisfying rendition of this synthesiser-rich track. Bass was tight and tuneful, and integrated seamlessly with an open and even midband that – despite its obvious smoothness – was satisfyingly detailed and open. The Spendors didn't half image – they disappeared into the recorded acoustic, pushing the vocal forward and above the plane of the speakers with tremendous precision. Yet tonally, never did they sound hard or acerbic – something I can't say about many price rivals. Treble was impressive too – decently spacious and airy, with a smooth nature that integrated perfectly with the sophis-



VERDICT

Superbly capable loudspeaker offers sophistication and musicality in equal measure. A stand-out product at the price that should win it great many friends.

SPENDOR S6E £1,495PR
SPENDOR AUDIO SYSTEMS LTD.
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 www.spendoraudio.com

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

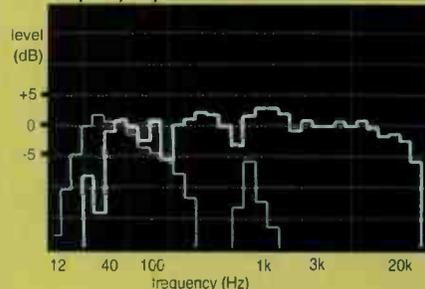
Like an increasing number of floor-standing rivals the S6 uses a floor sized port that drives a rearward vertical resonant mode most efficiently. For a 6ft casing this ensures a goodly amount of 60Hz bass, the exact frequency most music producers use to fiddle up bass in a recording. The port is tuned lower, peaking at roughly 35Hz, but is only a few dB down at 60Hz so it will provide plenty of output at this frequency. Since the S6 also has a flat forward response down to 40Hz it doesn't lack bass and should in practice go low and sound quite fast.

A peak in port output corresponds to a dip in forward response at 500Hz, pointing to a box effect that may be audible as a small amount of colouration. Otherwise, the S6 has a fairly smooth response characteristic that, as usual with Spendor, rolls down slowly and smoothly at high frequencies. The roll down is judiciously applied to ensure the S6 will sound clear and detailed, but not hard or sharp. Spendors are usually easy on the ear, but also accurate – and the S6 follows this pattern.

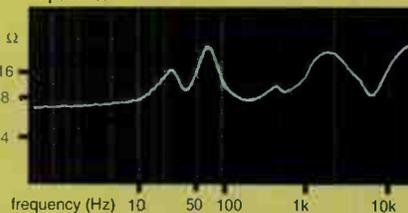
Impedance is very high at 9ohms across the audio band. It only drops to 6ohms from 10Hz - DC. Sensitivity was a reasonable 88dB all the same, so the speaker is a easy load.

The S6 is a nicely balanced loudspeaker with plentiful bass, accompanied by a smoother, softer delivery than is common nowadays. NK

Frequency response



Impedance



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present, correct

Christmas is coming and it's time for our loved ones to go shopping for a gift to put a smile on our faces, throughout the festive season and beyond - so here's a handy guide for them! Simply circle what you want and leave the magazine strategically open on the relevant page...

SONY XDR-S1 DIGITAL RADIO £150

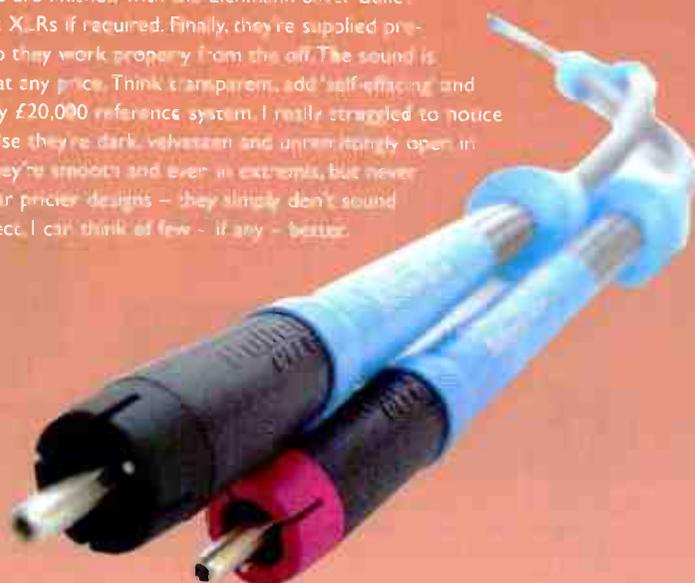
It's to Pure Digital's eternal credit that it's been marketing a decent quality DAB portable for the best part of two years now, and so it was probably only a matter of time before Sony moved in. The Japanese giant has a somewhat schizophrenic attitude to new technology - either it pushes its own new leading edge formats (Elcaset, R-DAT, MiniDisc) or it sits on the fence until practically everyone else has done it - and then comes in with the best in class. The latter is the case here - the XDR-S1 is superb. As an all round premium package, this classy portable is hard to beat - although the company's first DAB portable, it is right first time. Performance, features and ergonomics are up to the company's usual superlative standards. Switch on, press 'auto tune' and within a minute you've every Digital Radio network stored and accessible at the push of a button. Everything from the presets to the EQ settings are so easily accessed that its rivals seem from a bygone age - and the neat bundled remote is a nice touch, too. Sound is usefully crisp and clean - but not obviously stronger than its Pure Digital rivals. It is undeniably well made from strong plastics, the paper white backlit LC display is the best around and the myriad features (including full MW/LW reception too) are impressive. Only the XDR-S1's willfully weird styling, which isn't as elegant as Pure's rivals, detracts. Contact:

www.sony.co.uk



CLEARER AUDIO SILVERLINE OPTIMUS INTERCONNECT £320/0.5M

There's no shortage of excellent high end phono-to-phono cables, many of which come from established and respected brands such as van den Hul and Chord Company. This is fine state of affairs, but what depresses is that there's also a glut of ludicrously overpriced stuff from obscure fly-by-night brands promising the earth, in a bid to get rich quick. Well, although I'd never heard of Clearer Audio, I'm pleased to say that it is most definitely not one of the latter. In fact, here's a high end interconnect that can compete aggressively with anything boasting a prestigious 'blue-chip' brand. A double balanced design featuring 6N Super-Pure Silver (99.9999%), there are seven solid conductors per core arranged in a multi-strand concentric configuration. Each core is insulated in super-low loss foamed polyethylene insulation. Each interconnect features a six layer Star Shielding Technique; and all layers of shielding are grounded. In addition, the interconnects are fitted with the company's 'Super Suppressor' ferrite rings which attenuate a wide range of EMI, but are specifically designed to suppress RFI. The interconnects are finished with the Eichmann Silver Bullet RCAs, silver soldered, but can be terminated with Neutrik XLRs if required. Finally, they're supplied pre-burned in on the Audiodynam Pro 2.5 Cable Cooker - so they work properly from the off. The sound is superb - they're one of the very best we've come across at any price. Think transparent, ad 'self-effacing' and 'characterless' and you've got their gauge. Even through my £20,000 reference system, I really struggled to notice any discernable character. Compared to almost anything else they're dark, velvety and unpretentiously open in nature, with excellent rhythm and firecracker dynamics. They're smooth and even in extremes, but never with that annoying 'high end' sheen and gloss from many far pricier designs - they simply don't sound like anything. As a CD to amp, or pre-to-power interconnect, I can think of few - if any - better. Contact: www.clearer-audio.co.uk.





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This is surely the best audiophile digital disc player at the price. It's brilliantly conceived - it ticks (and largely succeeds) to touch all bases a serious audiophile could possibly want. It's interestingly styled, superbly built, has no superfluous (but many useful) features, great operational flexibility and superb sound. As an SACD player it's probably at the price - especially as the audio output stage. This machine is simply far sweeter, warmer and more analogues sounding than anything I've heard at the price, some may find it too much so, others might prefer to stick to analogue, but for most, it's in the latter camp.

David Price Editor - Hi-Fi World



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CREEK OBH-21SE HEADPHONE AMPLIFIER £250



Time was when every audio separate came complete with a 6.3mm jack socket for stereo headphones, but the purist nineties, with its 'source direct' ethos, soon saw to that. The result was that in order to listen to hi-fi headphones, you now had to buy a separate headphone amplifier. Musical Fidelity's

original X-CANS from some five years back was the first great 'standout' product, but Creek soon joined the fray with some excellent designs – the latest of which is the OBH-21SE. Creek's OBH-21 Special Edition is, not surprisingly, a tweaked version, with the main change being a switch from discrete transistors to integrated circuits. In SE form it offers a capacitorless, DC coupled, power supply. Creek claim that component quality has been improved. Looking at the specifications,

it's hard to argue with a THD figure that has fallen from 0.01% in the standard version to 0.005% in the SE.

Compared to standard headphone pre-amps, the first thing you're likely to notice is the wonderful transparency. It's as though a layer of grime has been swept off the disc. Decay and echo that was only hinted at before, is now clear and precise. The OBH-21SE has an excellent sense of timing, immensely articulate and sympathetic to the music. Whilst being punchy though, bass wasn't especially deep – some weight has been traded for speed and agility. More surprisingly I also found vocals a little forward, although there's excellent insight. Vocals weren't as sumptuous as a tube design, but they did have a sense of realism and excellent instrument separation. This isn't one of those amps' that's so analytical that, what should be, background information, becomes too much to the fore. Tonally I did find the piano a little bright, but the instruments had a decent sense of realism. A great little headphone amp then, but match carefully to a warm sounding system and headphones – if you've already got forward phones, then Musical Fidelity's X-CANS v3 should prove more palatable. Contact www.creekaudio.co.uk

REVO IN-CAR DAB RECEIVER PERSONAL £199.95

Now here's a thing. Right now, if you want car DAB – and why not? – then you have to junk your existing car stereo (no matter how superb it may be in other respects) and buy one of the plethora of off-the-shelf solutions from major manufacturers. Enter Revo: the most versatile Digital Radio on sale, offering true portability from car to pocket to home hi-fi. Revo is simply a module that slots into (variously) its car kit (standard), home docking station (£50) or portable battery back (£50) – meaning you can take it anywhere. It plugs into any car stereo system, offering high quality, crisp DAB reception at the touch of a button through the existing speakers. The bright blue backlit display is large enough to read but not to distract – and the ancillary controls are easy to see and use. However you power it, it works just like any other Digital Radio (i.e. simply and easily), and is genuinely fine sounding when driving a decent car or home sound system. Its silver and black styling is crisp and contemporary, but a choice of finishes and display colours – to match one's car dashboard – would be nice. A nationwide installation service is available at £49.95. It's an inspired way to add DAB to your existing auto stereo system – and your home one too. Contact www.revo.co.uk



Not for conservatives

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Sound & Vision
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RUSS ANDREWS TAK-H SME TONEARM CABLE £420/M

Rega Research lived the best part of two decades in denial about the difference that superior wire could make to the sound of its excellent tonearms. Linn Products spent a further ten years more selling the excellent Ittok and then the superb Ekos with equally lacklustre cabling. As for SME, well this company's only concession to the 'fad' that is 'fancy wire' is Litz headshell leads on the Series V – whoopee do! Enter Russ Andrews, with one of the best upgrades you can make to any SME Series 309, IV or V – a length of its TAK H Kimber Kable terminated

with Kimber Kable UltraPlate Contact Surface plugs on one end, and the stock SME arm plug on the other. You'll be amazed at the difference this admittedly hefty priced mod makes. Modern SME arms have been (rightly) accused of a mechanical sound, but this really pulls a lot of that coldness out of the equation. They still don't sing like a unipivot, but the whole experience is far more 'analogue', less 'analytical' – there's richer tonal colouring, more vibrant texturality and a generally more organic sense to the whole event. Factor in brilliant bass grip, stunning dynamics and pin-sharp image location (as ever), and it makes for a magnificent upgrade. The modern SMEs were always awesome in their way, but now they're magic in other ways too.

Contact: www.russandrews.com



SOUND ORGANISATION Z5 EQUIPMENT SUPPORT £219

Back in the old days, folk used to put their hi-fi systems on sideboards, dressers, coffee tables and shelving units. It kept the kit off the floor and blended in with the furniture nicely – as it was the furniture, or part of it at least! Life went on happily enough until some annoying anorak somewhere realised that simply plonking high quality audio separates on things that had previously been reserved for flowerpots, ornaments and pictures of the children was in fact acting against the best interests of the sound. This was due to the fact that electronic components are, in fact, microphonic – and that structure and air-borne vibrations were passing up through the floors, walls and air to sully the sound. Putting audio electronics on light, rigid stands negated this effect, enabling vibrations to 'sink' to a physical ground far easier. An entire industry sprang up, making equipment supports to make hi-fi sound better. The Sound Organisation was a key player, with its excellent turntable table which made many a Linn Sondek sing. Trouble is, it was black and looked like a mess of welded square section tubular steel and painted MDF (which, err, it was)... These days, the company makes an altogether more sophisticated design – the new Z Series is an arrestingly simple yet elegant equipment rack designed to house hi-fi or AV components. There are three models in the new range, a five shelf 500mm wide hi-fi unit, a three shelf 900mm wide home cinema unit and, for the first time, a four shelf mid-size 640mm wide unit. Manufactured in England from precision laser-cut steel, it's available in a choice of high gloss piano black and satin silver. The shelves are colour co-ordinated and made from toughened safety glass. Every model is supplied with adjustable floor spikes and the two home cinema units are also provided with a set of castors. All are supplied flat-packed and assembled quickly with ease. They're great looking, work very well (you'll hear better sounding supports, but you'll have to pay three times as much!) and complete it any audio system. The Z5 – the five tier hi-fi support – is a brilliant all purpose design at £219. Contact: www.soundorganisation.net.





FRANK ZAPPA
QUAUDIOPHILIA
 (DVD-AUDIO: 24/96 STEREO
 24/96 MULTI-CHANNEL)

About six months ago I was lead to believe that the Zappa Family Trust may have been about to follow up the inaugural Zappa DVD-Audio, the unavailable-in-any-other-format 'Halloween', with straight to DVD-Audio transfers of some of the finished album quad mixes Zappa completed during his flirtation with the format in the seventies. Hopefully we will still see those discs of 'Overnite Sensation', 'Apostrophe' and 'Roxy and Elsewhere' sometime soon, but in the meantime Zappa's elder son Dweezil and wife Gail have seen fit to release another original DVD-Audio, based on more of Frank's quad mixes, excavated from the cavernous tape library of the Utility Muffin Research Kitchen.

For the rabid Zappa fan this cannot fail to be of huge interest. Enjoyment may be a different matter, depending on your tastes. There are probably few people who enjoy all elements of his music equally, but this fifty minute compilation contains most of the possibilities: orchestral work ('Lumpy Gravy'), guitar work-outs ('Rollo'), deranged scatological songs ('Wild Love') and jazz awesomeness (the incomparable surround version of 'Waka-Jawaka').

The surround recording fidelity is

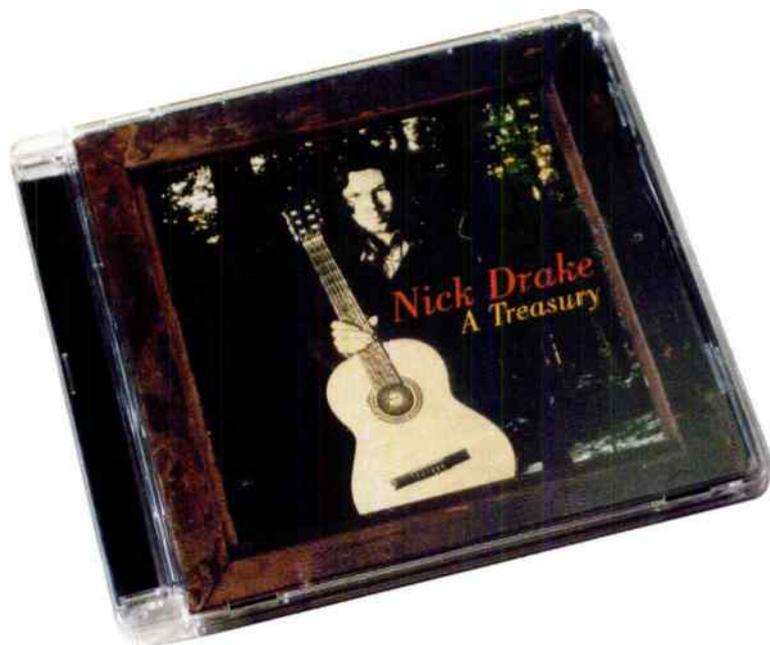
superb throughout (you'd better get full range rears if you want to enjoy the orchestral action in the surrounds to the max), and the real joy is that unlike 'Halloween' the stereo (superfluous though it is) is not downsampled to 48kHz. Presumably this is possible due to the shorter running time. It goes without saying that this is not a release intended to hook in the non-believers. I would passionately encourage anyone who thinks they may be interested in the great man to snap up that 'Overnite Sensation' DVD-A when it arrives, and if that provokes you to follow through the trail of 70 or more albums which make up Frank's oeuvre, you should be ready for this one by the end...

THE DONNAS
GOLD MEDAL
 (CD/ DVD-AUDIO DUAL PACK:
 24/96 STEREO 24/96 MULTI-CHANNEL)

While it's encouraging to see Warners finally return to the DVD-Audio fray with some (relatively) new talent rather than all that legacy stuff, it has been a fairly disheartening experience to witness the PR blunder with which they shot themselves in the foot when they released this title on Dual Disc in the States. Anyway, for further details of that debacle, see this month's column, because we have escaped the problems of the

Americans due to the still looming threat to Dual Disc's viability in Europe – Dieter Dierks and his DVDplus patents. At least Warners have finally embarked on the 'stealth' method of getting hi-res surround into peoples' homes, which the SACD crowd have been doing for some time. Albums such as this one and the simultaneously released Simple Plan album are sold in a standard size double CD jewel case, and at CD price level.

To this listener that makes them a bargain, even if you only want to be able to listen to the stereo mix in a higher-than-CD resolution. In fact in the case of this title you had better only be interested in doing that or seeing the videos, as Chris Lord-Alge's surround mix (to my knowledge this may well be his first one) adds little to his excellent wall-of-sound stereo effort, and may in actual fact detract from the main plus point of this recording. Yes, they may be an all-girl group, but my, do they have balls, and the addition of reverb-y surrounds just dilutes their power. This is firmly kick-ass rock 'n roll territory, and all the better for it. The songs are predominantly tight power-pop ditties, with raw and chunky power-chords, hand-claps, pedaling bass-lines and simplistic but catchy drum patterns, all giving a feel redolent of early Kiss, which can't be a bad thing!



NICK DRAKE
A TREASURY
 (HYBRID SACD: STEREO AND
 MULTI-CHANNEL DSD)

When I went to interview SACD mastering supreme Simon Heyworth a year ago he played me (unannounced) the finished analogue master of this year's Nick Drake outtakes compilation 'Made To Love Magic' straight off his Aria-modified ATR. I was spellbound – it sounded like Nick was playing and singing in the room. Now it is finally possible to enjoy that effect in your own home with the release of this stunning SACD. The cynical view of all this remarketing effort may be that it amounts to exploitation, but my view is that both this and the 'Made To Love Magic' project are respectful attempts to conserve Nick Drake's small but perfectly formed legacy under the control of the only individual other than Nick who was present at every recording session – engineer John Wood. This music is so good that it deserves to be presented to each successive generation of the world's youth, and so it has proved, from the original seventies discoveries via the Island compilations, through the Nick Laird-Clowes endorsed 'Heaven In a Wild Flower' compilation in the mid eighties, to the mid nineties' 'Way To Blue' introduction.

But many might view the addition of a surround mix too much. Well

there isn't a lot to send whizzing around the room, but the sense of three dimensional space which this version imbues does give the likes of 'Black Eyed Dog' that spooky "he's in the room" feeling. If you don't like it, you've got the best stereo version you're ever likely to hear... Just be advised that Simon tells me that all three original albums have been mastered and authored, but are currently on hold – let's hope they make it out, in the meantime we can enjoy the meagre unreleased extra here – a guitar snippet called 'Plaisir D'Amour', included as a hidden track.

VARIOUS
POOR BOY: A NICK DRAKE
TRIBUTE
 (HYBRID SACD: STEREO DSD
 ONLY)

There are multifarious traps when attempting to make a tribute album and Tony Reif of Songlines Records (www.songlines.com) is wise enough to cover himself in his sleeve note explaining the origins and ethos of this project. It has obviously been a labour of love for him, and the results demonstrate that his time has been well spent. Although this disc has next to no 'name' contributors, on the whole it succeeds in its sleeve's promise of "Nick Drake re-imagined by jazz improvisers, singer-songwriters, experimenters... Music that crosses styles; recorded in

analogue or 24 bits"

I am reminded of the occasionally straight, occasionally twisted likes of Hal Wilner's starchy, interpretative albums of Brecht/Weill or Disney standards, except without the stars. The personnel here is predominantly drawn from Reif's jazzy Vancouver mates, supplemented by some Seattleites, among them the Nonesuch recording artist Robin Holcomb. She forms part of the contingent of female vocalists who give the first half of this 78 minute album a distaff bent, while in the main the gents (including Ian Masters, once of the Pale Saints, in his Friendly Science Orchestra guise 4AD fans!) take over for the return leg.

As the sessions were mostly recorded (or mixed) at 24/88.2 resolution the disc has a satisfyingly authentic hi-res sound to it. Even the solitary element of 16bit origin, the clarinet on 'Road', sounds excellent to these ears. The gently warped versions of 'River Man' and 'Black Eyed Dog' are among the most successful tracks. Stereo jazz fans should definitely have a punt on this one – it is available inexpensively from www.play.com, although they never seem to have any in stock. Of course, www.dvd4music.com might be worth a go if you're prepared to pay a premium for your impatience! However if you're interested in Drake but jazz- or avant-garde-averse I would give this a miss.



blu for you?

Digital Video is advancing apace, with High Definition TV just around the corner. Blu-Ray is a new high capacity optical video disc that's up against the forthcoming HD-DVD format in a battle to succeed DVD – and provide the natural successor to Compact Disc. Noel Keywood gets out his crystal ball...

The main purpose of both Blu-Ray and HD-DVD is to store High Definition video, which requires much more space than the basic 4.7GB of DVD. Both use blue lasers, hence the evocative name of one. Firing light of shorter wavelength than the traditional red laser, a blue laser can resolve smaller surface transitions on a disc, be they mechanical or reflective, allowing much more information to be stored. On a disc the size of a CD (12cm) HD-DVD crams in 15MB on a single layer. Recordable discs will manage 20MB. Blu-Ray manages even more - 27MB for a recordable disc, for example, although both Sony and Panasonic already claim 100GB-200GB has been achieved with multi-layer discs.

High Definition television for many years, but it is America's move to HDTV that has set the ball rolling. In Britain Sky has announced it will move to HDTV on some channels by 2006 and the BBC plan to broadcast HDTV pictures by 2010. Euro1080 already broadcasts Europe wide from satellite but, this apart, Europe lags behind America and Japan, where sports broadcasts are proving popular in HD format. Blu-Ray in particular is aimed at this market, as a way of recording programmes off-air.

Many U.S. television shows are recorded in High Definition and (analogue) cinema film converts to HD (having a far greater native resolution), so there's plenty of HD programme material. Sony recently announced the first semi-pro HD

HD-DVD is being positioned as a successor to DVD. Discs are easy and cheap to mass produce, the DVD Forum claim, using existing DVD production equipment, unlike Blu-Ray. HD-DVD players will play standard DVDs too, although it now appears Blu-Ray will have this ability also. Additionally Blu-Ray will record to CD, DVD!

There were significant differences between Blu-Ray and HD-DVD, but as Blu-Ray develops - and it has massive backing - limitations are being removed. To overcome retail racking reticence, Sony are even proposing a hybrid BD/CD disc that will play on CD players and Blu-Ray players. It's interesting that Sony still attaches so much importance to the music CD, which it co-developed with Philips, and has already come up with a way of overcoming the reluctance of major retailers like HMV to stock new music formats. A hybrid like this could be racked as a CD and it will, of course, play in portables, boom boxes and cars, plus all the millions of CD players worldwide. This has proven a key problem with DVD, to which neither SACD nor DVD-A have proved a satisfactory solution. In a BD player a hybrid disc like this would provide video and better audio quality.

FUTURE FORMATS

Although there's plenty of space on the new discs, a trade off between audio and video may still occur, on single layer discs at least. How to provide this with sufficient flexibility to enable audio and video quality to

“Blu-Ray has been spec'd to blow our socks off audio wise... six channels of 24bit, 192kHz music an option”

As you might guess there's no end of complexity within new formats like this, with talk about laser wavelengths, pit sizes, numerical apertures and what have you. But what does this all mean for audio? Well, recently, some recommended audio specifications have been emerging, giving some fascinating insights into what lies ahead for high fidelity. As CD sales slowly decline around the world it looks increasingly likely that in future audio will be carried on next generation video discs.

DVD's success has been attributed mainly to quality; the analogue VHS cassette it was designed to replace never did so well. This has invigorated efforts to improve picture quality in television, film and DVD video, especially as display technologies improve to cope. Japan has experimented with

camcorder, the amazing HDR-FX1. So there's no shortage of material. In the States Microsoft even offer HD video compressed onto DVD.

In some respects Blu-ray and HD-DVD are a little late in arriving; Sony in particular are pushing Blu-Ray hard; recorders are needed in Japan and the USA for recording sports events. Blu-Ray is a high capacity recording technology suitable for this purpose.

In Japan Panasonic have launched the DMRE700 Blu-Ray recorder, shown here. Since Blu-Ray specifications are still being agreed, recorders like this are unlikely to possess a full set of capabilities. Full standard players are due the end of 2005.



be balanced to cope with widely differing requirements is where the new discs show improvement over standard DVD. Interestingly, both adopt the same new approach to coping with a wide range of audio formats, an offer from Dolby and DTS.

The talk now is of "extensible" systems, replacing fixed specification audio. There are two new technologies to take on board here: Dolby Digital Plus (DD+) and DTS-HD (aka DTS ++). They comprise the core system we use today on DVD, namely Dolby Digital and DTS, with extra data that can be optionally used to improve sound quality. This brings extra flexibility to digital and in doing so it will simplify buying choices, whilst at the same time facilitating quality improvement.

Dolby Digital Plus is Dolby Digital accompanied by extra data. The Dolby Digital core provides 5.1 surround-sound at a data rate typically at 345kbps. This is roughly one-tenth that of the uncompressed signal, so we can liken Dolby Digital

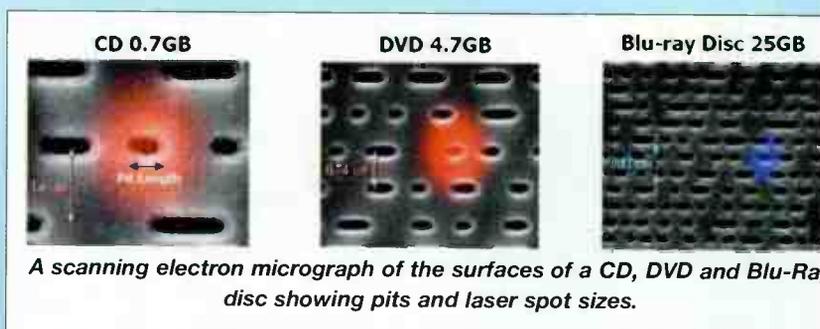
stronger video compression schemes, so there is less need to compromise sound quality by such heavy compression. Roughly speaking 10:1 compression is just audible, whilst 5:1 is not, withstanding very critical analysis. At 2:1 compression becomes lossless, meaning no audio data is thrown away, so the sound is indistinguishable from the original.

Dolby told us that Dolby Digital Plus has a maximum data rate of 6Mbps, roughly ten times greater than Dolby Digital. It can support up to 13.1 channels, 96kHz sampling rate and 24bit

resolution, they say. Digital Plus will carry 'metadata' (data about data) instructing decoders how to mixdown, say from 7.1 to 5.1 or to

mixes down internally according to preset tables is convenient but doesn't necessarily sound right. Telling the player how to do this using metadata should overcome the difficulty.

Dolby Laboratories don't make clear at present how much compression will be reduced by the additional data carried by Dolby Digital Plus. They did tell us that Dolby will not become lossless; for



"it seems that all the drawbacks of DVD, including DVD-A, have been overcome by Blu-Ray..."

to high quality mp3 surround-sound. Heavy compression was needed to squeeze 5.1 channels of cinema surround-sound onto a DVD along with all the picture information, which hogs most of the space. The new discs have considerably more space available, not just because of their larger capacities but also due to

stereo. At present multi-channel discs must carry either a stereo mix, or players be set to mixdown according to internal tables. A stereo mix satisfies the producer's intentions, but you have to manually select it first, which usually means switching on a TV. It also takes up more room on the disc. Setting a player to stereo so it

this MLP, which they license, must be used.

DTS are more specific and forthcoming with data about DTS-HD. It too is an extensible system where extra data accompanies a DTS 5.1 core. The rationale of DTS always was to provide higher audio quality than Dolby, through less compression. Publicity came when it was chosen for the film Jurassic Park to maximise impact of the audio track. This emphasis on quality, at the expense of compression, is providential, suiting expanding disc capacities and the thirst for better quality. DTS-HD offers up to 96/24 resolution with compression reducing to lossless, and can deliver any number of channels.

Both new data formats offer

HOLOGRAPHIC RECORDING:

Fed up with new formats? Wondering where it will all end? According to the Blu-Ray founders, HD-DVD is a "transitional technology", not one for the future... are they right?

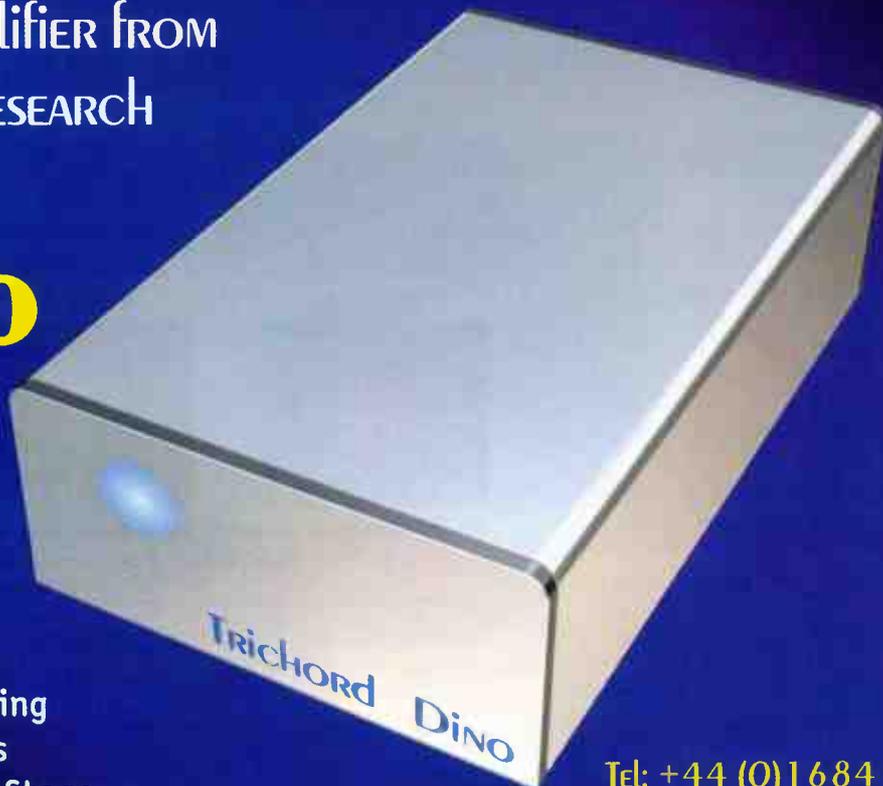
Although DVD has been a great success, it has also been a source of confusion. Blu-Ray is better thought through than CD or DVD; for example, the recordable version was developed first to perfect packet writing and lossless linking, so that the ROM would be compatible. This avoids the sort of confusion that existed around DVD-R and DVD+R. Blu-Ray is supported by all major Consumer Electronics manufacturers, as well as the entire computer industry. It has been purposed as an advanced universal storage format and, in multi-layer form, has sufficient capacity to store hours of high definition video. No one company has the resources to replace it, nor to effectively compete against it. The DVD Forum, primarily Toshiba or NEC, will have an uphill struggle with HD-DVD.

With Blu-Ray we are now at a point where consumer replay technology has surpassed the standards used by recording studios and broadcasters. Consumer HD camcorders will soon be able to match or surpass television broadcast quality and 24/192 analogue-to-digital conversion will be available to audio enthusiasts well before we are able to buy music recorded to this quality level at HMV.

Blu-Ray is likely to have a long life, longer than DVD. There are no replacement technologies imminent, nor much likelihood of any group being able to launch them onto a world market in opposition to Philips, Sony and Panasonic. Further into the future Holographic recording, if it can be perfected, offers a huge increase in storage capacity, possibly more than any audio or video system would need until recording and display technologies improve enormously.

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© Blu-ray Disc Founders, August 2004

Audio	CODEC	PCM	Dolby Digital	dts	dts++
	Max.bitrate	27.648Mbps	640kbps	1.536Mbps	TBC
	Max.ch	8(48kHz, 96kHz), 6(192kHz)	5.1	5.1	7.1
	bits/sample	16, 20, 24	16	16	16, 20, 24
	Sampling frequency	48kHz, 96kHz, 192kHz	48kHz	48kHz	48kHz, 96kHz, 192kHz

Blu-Ray audio specifications as they stand at present. Already it has been decided that this disc should improve upon DVD-A.

great compatibility. The new discs will play back core S.I information on budget players, or high resolution audio on expensive players. Where before separate tracks were needed, now one track does it all, saving valuable space. If, however, discs carry both Dolby and DTS then this space efficiency will be squandered. As both Dolby and DTS decoders are mandatory on Blu-Ray and HD-DVD players, discs may well carry one or the other, not both, as is often the case with DVD.

Dolby and DTS are not the only players in town though. Microsoft want in and are pushing the benefits of their own music compression scheme - which includes lower licensing costs (for now, at least!) - within VC-9. They too have 24/96 compressed audio on offer, with up to 7.1 channels.

As disc capacities increase, compression becomes less necessary. With this in mind it would seem, and as acknowledgment to the fact that, traditionally, improved audio quality has had an almost magical ability to underpin demand of new formats, both HD-DVD and Blu-Ray can

optionally carry uncompressed audio. So far only two channels of 24/192kHz (stereo) is being quoted

Dolby Digital Plus as well as DTS-HD carry metadata internally, six channels should mix down to two channel

“Sony has already come up with a way of overcoming the reluctance of major retailers like HMV to stock new music formats...”

for HD-DVD. Blu-Ray, however, lists six channels of 24bit, 192kHz audio as an option. Since one channel of 24/192 runs at 4.6Mbps, six add up to a massive data rate of 27.648Mbps and, not surprisingly, this is the maximum quoted audio data rate for Blu-Ray.

Blu-Ray has been spec'd to blow our socks off audio wise. One hour of audio at this specification consumes 13GB of space, so there's still plenty of room left over for video even on a single sided, single layer disc. If lossless compression is applied it falls to 6GB, so whichever way you look at it storage technology has now reached a point where, as far as audio is concerned, no more is needed. Since Blu-Ray carries metadata tracks, and

successfully in BD players set to deliver stereo. So ultimately we can expect BD to offer top quality digital in whatever format we want, without hassle.

All the drawbacks of DVD, including DVD-A, have been overcome it seems by Blu-Ray. But since Sony, Philips and Matsushita (Panasonic) are all founders, perhaps this was always to be expected. Sony and Philips in particular have always considered the optical disc their inheritance. All the same, HD-DVD may well get the backing of Hollywood and be first to market with HD-DVD discs in the shops. Whatever the outcome of any battle of the rays, better audio is on the way.

SOUND AFFECTS:

Two main factors determine digital sound quality: resolution and compression. Between them they account for much of the inexplicable jargon associated with today's digital audio products. As the technology matures (and there's a way to go yet) the torrent of jargon should subside, but in the meantime here's simple guide:

Resolution is the accuracy with which a signal can be captured, in amplitude and frequency. Amplitude resolution of CD was 16-bit, but this produces unpleasant distortion on low level signals that we seem able to detect. Nowadays, 24-bit is the accepted standard and it definitely does give a smoother sound, with a greater sense of dynamic freedom. These days most professional recordings are 24bit. Where you see acronyms like DTS 96/24, the 24 means 24-bit amplitude resolution. Frequency resolution is, in analogue terms, known as bandwidth, or 'frequency response', which in a digital system is set by sampling rate. Maximum analogue bandwidth is (just under) half the sampling rate, so CD with 44.1kHz sampling rate reaches up to 21kHz. On DVD, 24/96 digital has a 96kHz sampling rate, with an analogue bandwidth of 48kHz, whilst 192kHz sample rate digital possesses an analogue bandwidth of 96kHz.

Which is best - and does it matter? Theoretically, 192kHz is best - so good as to be indisputably beyond criticism, but very few recordings are made at this rate, as suitable recording equipment hardly exists. Most Rock is recorded at 24/48, but 24/96 is becoming more common. The few 24/192 recordings that exist on DVD-A do sound very different - finely detailed in a dense and intricate fashion quite unlike what we are used to today. It may be 10 years or so before 24/192 becomes common though.

Digital music is compressed so it takes up less storage space and can be squeezed down telephone lines. Compression is not a good thing, no matter how clever (and it is very clever). Music is 'compressed' by throwing data away. In low amounts this is largely inaudible, judged against what we are used to today. At high levels it makes music sound bland, coarse and 'swimmy'. Music is part of our cultural heritage and compression destroys its richness and compromises its value at source. Archivists and museums object to its use, and so do many artists.

DTS understand the trend away from compression and the Blu-Ray founders likely do too, as the top audio specification is PCM, which means no compression. In truth lossless compression (this is true compression, not data reduction) is most likely to be used and Meridian Lossless Packing improves the integrity of a digital signal. Compression schemes, namely mp3, Musicam, Atrac, WMA, AAC, Dolby Digital and DTS may well fade out of use in time, except for squeezing audio down telephone lines.

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SINGLE-ENDED PURITY

Our Parallel Single Ended (PSE) power amplifiers offer ultimate sound quality. Each monobloc has two beautifully linear 300B directly heated triodes in its output stage, producing 20 watts into an 8 ohm load. At the front of the circuit we there is a 6AU6 pentode, followed by an ECC82 as the driver valve. This design uses a 5U4 rectifier valve in the power supply, in combination with a 10H choke, giving an extremely quiet supply. Both mains and output transformers are built on high quality E/I pattern cores.

Feedback can be switched in or out whilst running, using a rear panel switch. Complex layered and sectioned output transformers give full output and low distortion across the audio band even without feedback, making such an option possible.

This is one of the few amplifiers in the world so good it will work without feedback - and no feedback is the preference of most buyers. It gives a spacious, relaxed and fluid sound quite unlike that of solid-state amps, all of which use feedback to correct deficiencies.

By operating linearly in feedbackless, pure Class A, single-ended mode these



300B monoblocs are as pure as it gets - and sound quality reflects the fact. Fast, clean and clear in their presentation, at the same time their purity of sound is easy on the ear.

The kit is totally hard-wired; it does not use circuit boards. We can supply without valves, or with the superb Tesla 300Bs, Russian 5U4s and European 6AU6s & ECC82. Our 300B PSE kit bears an affordable price of £895.00 (UK price) excluding valves. Each monobloc weighs 23kgs (50lbs). External dimensions with valves: 25cm(w) x 38cm(d) x 22cm(h) per monobloc.

PUSH-PULL POWER

For more power, we also offer 300B in Push-Pull (PP) form. The 300B PP monobloc shares the same look and chassis as the 300B PSE monobloc. The 300B PP kit has been created for those who prefer a bit more power. With a pair of 300Bs in push-pull configuration providing 26 watts output, they will drive most modern loudspeakers to perfection. Andy Grove's design is totally feedbackless, using a 6AU6 pentode as the input valve and a 5687 as the phase splitter. The power supply uses a Russian 5U4 for rectification. The kit is constructed by hard wiring, so some experience is required. 300B PSE owners do have the option to buy the conversion kit for £250.00 to turn their monoblocs to push-pull status. Each monobloc weighs 23kg.

300B PSE MONOBLOC KIT

£1197 per pair

300B PP MONOBLOC KIT

£1197 per pair

The PRE-II is a high quality valve pre-amplifier that will drive any power amplifier. It has a gain of x5 which, with CD, enables it to deliver a large 10V output swing. To keep the amount of active amplification low, this pre-amp uniquely uses a line drive transformer to deliver a pure signal to the power amplifier. There are six inputs, a tape monitor and two sets of output sockets. It is powered by the external PSU-II power supply. The volume control uses high quality Alps Blue potentiometer which, with our solid, turned brass, chromed knob, gives a quality feel rarely encountered these days.

PHONO-II is a dedicated valve phono stage for MM cartridges, with MC input transformers an option. By using all-d.c. supplies from PSU-II and a case in which there is no power supply, PHONO II is hum free, something that is difficult to achieve with valves. With accurate RIAA equalisation right down to 10Hz (-3dB) PHONO II gives a wonderfully pure, dimensional sound from LP, possessing a sense of life and dynamism quite different to solid-state preamps.

Finally, PSU-II is a power supply unit that feeds both the PRE-II and PHONO-II. Keeping the power supply separate removes hum, often the bane of valves.

Power Supply Unit (PSU-II)	£205.00
Pre-amplifier (PRE-II)	£215.00
Phono Stage (PHONO-II)	£110.00
Moving coil step-up transformer	£77.00



SERIES II MODULAR PRE-AMP KIT

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Kel84 is an affordable, integrated valve amplifier for those who want to enjoy the valve sound, but from a simple, easy to build kit. It uses inexpensive EL84 output valves, known for their sweet sound, in conventional push-pull arrangement to provide 15 watts into an 8 ohm load. The output transformers are our own quality Ultra Linear design. Up front, the circuit employs an ECF80 input/phase splitter valve, which contributes to Kel84's extremely smooth sound. The amplifier has very low hum and for simplicity it is built on a printed circuit board. A strong steel chassis is fronted by a 3mm anodised front panel and attractive brushed aluminium effect knobs. There are five line level inputs, plus one monitor input, with a tape output included, all controlled from the front panel.

At the rear is a mains switch/IEC power input, earth post, phono sockets, and 4mm banana sockets for loudspeakers. The Kel84 will highlight all the intricacies and depth of detail in your favourite recordings whilst retaining a warmth and fullness that is almost exclusive to pure valve amps and is rare at this price point.

Kel84 weighs 10kg. External dimensions with valves are 300mm(w) x 270mm(d) x 150mm(h).



KEL84 VALVE INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER KIT £298



Our 6550 series amplifiers are built around the rugged 6550 beam tetrode that's popular in America. This valve is widely available at a good price. Producing no less than 40 watts into an 8 ohm load. (available in a 4 ohm version if required) our 6550 is a power house, since valve watts always sound louder than transistor watts!

The difference between our 6550 and most others is that we use valve rectification (5U4) and a choke pi filter, for a power supply that is quiet and free from solid-state hardness. This is a true high-end design from Andy Grove, hard wired. It is a cut above the many other 6550s, with enough power to drive most loudspeakers, including insensitive electrostatics for example. 6550 combines high



power with a top-end smoothness of sound, yet doesn't cost the earth to run, as the valves are inexpensive and have a long life. The amplifier weighs 19kg. Dimensions are 390mm(w) x 330mm(d) x 190mm(h) with valves, or 220mm(h) with cage.

KIT6550 - An integrated amplifier with line inputs and volume control. Accepts CD, tuner, tape etc., but not LP.

KAT6550 - A power amplifier for use with a separate pre-amp. Paired with PRE II and PHONO II (+PSU II), can provide LP reproduction.

KIT6550 VALVE INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER KIT £615 KAT6550 VALVE POWER AMPLIFIER KIT £580

The Headphone II amplifier is a beautifully simple design using Mullard ECL83 valves, a triode and power pentode housed in the same envelope. It works directly from any source, be it CD, tape, tuner etc., or from an amplifier's tape out or pre-amp out sockets. The circuit uses high specification E/I output transformers that will drive any headphone load from 16 ohms to over 300 ohms depending on how the secondaries are wired up.

The Headphone II is a pure Class A single-ended design with the power pentode wired up in triode configuration for added sonic purity, and it is as quiet as a mouse. Treble has the crispness of the best solid-state, but with the tonal resolution and delicacy associated with valves. Bass is punchy and controlled without becoming artificial.

External dimensions 270mm wide, 275mm deep and 85mm high



HEADPHONE II £285

These are expert kits, not for the inexperienced. You must be able to solder and read a circuit diagram. The valve kits contain lethal voltages. We cannot be held responsible for any errors arising from the construction of these kits.

wad



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Kec182 (8 ohm)	Kec182 (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£195.00	£170.00
2A3PSE with valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	2A3 PSE (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£570.00	£485.00
2A3PSE without valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	2A3 PSE (without valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£470.00	£400.00
KaT6550 with valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KaT6550 (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£580.00	£495.00
KaT6550 without valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KaT6550 (without valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£450.00	£380.00
KiT6550 with valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KiT6550 (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£615.00	£525.00
KiT6550 without valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KiT6550 (without valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£485.00	£415.00
KaT34 with valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KAT34(with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£480.00	£410.00
KaT34 without valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KAT34(without valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£415.00	£354.00
KiT34 with valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KiT34 (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£515.00	£440.00
KiT34 without valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	KiT34 (without valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£450.00	£385.00
Kel84 with valves (8 ohm)	Kel84 (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£298.00	£255.00
Kel84 without valves (8 ohm)	Kel84 (without valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£268.00	£230.00
PSU II	PSU - II	<input type="checkbox"/>	£205.00	£175.00
PRE II	PRE - II	<input type="checkbox"/>	£215.00	£185.00
PHONO II	PHONO II	<input type="checkbox"/>	£110.00	£95.00
PAS II	PAS II	<input type="checkbox"/>	£235.00	£200.00
Step ups transformers for MC use with PHONO II	MC - step up (pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£80.00	£68.00
Headphone II	Headphone II	<input type="checkbox"/>	£285.00	£236.00
300BPSE with valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	300B PSE (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£1197.00 per pair	£1020.00 per pair
300BPSE without valves (4ohm or 8ohm, pls specify)	300B PSE (no valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£895.00 per pair	£765.00 per pair
300BPP with valves (6 ohm)	300B PP (with valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£1197.00 per pair	£1020.00 per pair
300BPP without valves (6 ohm)	300B PP (no valves)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£895.00 per pair	£765.00 per pair

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6550 mains transformer	6550 mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	£120.00	£105.00
34 mains transformer	KIT34 - mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	£100.00	£85.00
kel84 mains transformer	Kel84 - mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	£60.00	£47.00
HD83 mains transformer	HD83 - mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	£40.00	£34.00
PSU II mains transformer	PSU-II - mains T	<input type="checkbox"/>	£40.00	£34.00
300B mains transformer	300B - mains T (each)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£115.00	£98.00
34/6550 choke	KIT34 - choke	<input type="checkbox"/>	£40.00	£34.00
kel84 choke	Kel84 - choke	<input type="checkbox"/>	£20.00	£17.00
300B choke	300B choke	<input type="checkbox"/>	£40.00	£34.00
2A3 PSE choke	2A3 PSE choke	<input type="checkbox"/>	£40.00	£34.00
PSU II choke	PSU-choke	<input type="checkbox"/>	£20.00	£17.00
6550 output transformer (4ohm or 8ohm)	6550 - O/P T (pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£130.00	£112.00
34 output transformer (4ohm or 8ohm)	34 - O/P T (pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£130.00	£112.00
kel84 output (8 ohm)	Kel84 - O/P T (pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£90.00	£78.00
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300BPSE output transformer (4ohm or 8ohm)	300B PSE - O/P T (each)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£110.00	£94.00
300BPP output transformer (6ohm)	300B PP - O/P T (each)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£110.00	£94.00
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kel34 PCB	Kel34 - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	£12.00	£11.00
kel80 PCB	Kel80 - PCB(pair)	<input type="checkbox"/>	£52.00	£45.00
KECL82 PCB	KECL82 - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	£25.00	£21.00
HD83 PCB	HD83 - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	£20.00	£17.00
PSU II PCB	PSU-II - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	£20.00	£17.00
PRE II PCB	PRE-II - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	£20.00	£17.00
PHONO II PCB	PHONO-II - PCB	<input type="checkbox"/>	£20.00	£17.00
tag board	TAG	<input type="checkbox"/>	£4.00	£3.00
ALPS 50K dual potentiometer	ALPS - 50K	<input type="checkbox"/>	£14.00	£12.00
ALPS 100K dual potentiometer	ALPS - 100K	<input type="checkbox"/>	£14.00	£12.00
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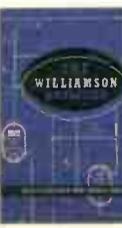
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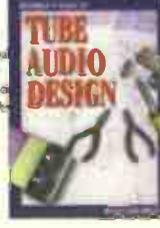
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I nearly choked on my coffee when a recent Denon UK press release stated, "the company were dropping SACD and DVD-A from their budget players," because, "these formats are being totally ignored by general consumers".

I've looked forward to hearing decent digital ever since CD was introduced. Both DVD-A and SACD were meant to right the deficiencies of CD which, despite the hype, is Stone Age digital from the 1970s. Even at its introduction, CD was returning distortion levels of 30% if it worked properly, to more than 100% if it didn't. When I first saw figures greater than 100% flash up on the analyser screen, a situation I'd never encountered with LP, I realised CD had serious weaknesses. Both DVD-A and SACD overcome them, offering a performance way ahead of all that's gone before. They should be real high fidelity, an exciting prospect. Are they really doomed as Denon state?

Denon qualifies the statement, saying the new discs are being ignored by general consumers rather than audiophiles. But it doesn't necessarily lessen the consequences, since DVD-A and SACD need to find a usefully large market to remain viable.

How large are disc sales? The International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, or IFPI, recently released sales figures for both formats. They list worldwide SACD sales as 3.9million units for 2003 and DVD-Audio as 1.3million. Alongside global CD sales of over 2 billion during the same period, this is a piffling 0.25% market share, which appears to back up Denon's assertion: DVD-A and SACD sales are miniscule. At 7.3 million, even LP sales were greater in 2003! So what's gone wrong?

It's easy to criticise both formats. With DVD-A you need to switch on

the TV and navigate slow and sometimes obstructive on-screen menus to get a peep out of it. Then there's the small matter of sound - DVD-A and SACD should have moved us out of the digital Stone Age, but it hasn't turned out that way. Sound quality isn't consistently better, because a rag bag of material, much of mediocre recording quality - analogue and digital - is being recycled through

” DVD-Audio is in a hopeless position - with virtually no retail presence it is doomed...

these new formats. My measurements show, for example, that digital programme is commonly 24/48. Sound quality wise it's a step up from CD, but not a big one. I even have suspicions about true 24/96 recordings, which often sound glassy. Methinks 24/96 should sound better. Underlying problems in resampling and poor A/D conversion are likely culprits.

In any case, improved sound quality is likely to be academic for a lot of people. All the lost souls listening to a modern day digital Dansette, an all-in-one hi-fi for £600 from Tesco let's say, would notice little improvement over CD because their hi-fi system simply would not resolve it. For this reason alone, given an option, neither DVD-A or SACD could ever sell on the promise of improved sound quality alone. More appreciable is the allure of surround-sound, but this hasn't worked out either. There's little interest in high fidelity surround-sound. All that is selling here are cheap all-in-one boxed home cinema systems. High quality audio remains stereo; in other words two high quality loudspeakers are all most people will tolerate in their home.

Whatever difficulties DVD-A and SACD have in ease of use and sound quality though, they are small against their presence - or lack of it - on the retail shelf. Music retailers don't like new formats. They tie up capital and shelf space, often for little benefit. Just as the market has rationalised to just one music format - CD - retailers are reluctant to contemplate stocking two alternatives. DVD-Audio finds itself in a hopeless position here, being incompatible with CD players and offering no benefit on most DVD players, which are hooked up to a TV, not a hi-fi. In a store, for the uninitiated an Audio DVD is a baffling alternative to a Music DVD, and the latter are selling like hotcakes. Hardly

surprising when they'll play on any DVD player, provide video and sound quality plenty good enough for most people. This really puts DVD Audio in a hopeless position, and I have recently seen it disappear from a number of HMVs. With virtually no retail presence it is doomed.

At least SACD is in a less ambiguous position within the retail environment - it can be placed alongside CD. There's no need to rack it separately. It's thought that a majority of purchasers listen to the CD layer though, or at best the high resolution layer mixed down to stereo.

DVD-A and SACD have found themselves between a rock and a hard place. They've failed to have any impact upon CD sales, and they're facing a difficult future. The success of the music DVD suggests music will migrate to video disc, and looking at the audio specifications of Blu-Ray and HD-DVD as they are being agreed right now I suspect this is where the future lies. I've not received one press release yet about either of these new video discs. If Denon get involved, as I'm sure they will, then there will be some interesting reading ahead... ●

David Price



This month's column is going to be just a tad self indulgent (which isn't to say that any other month's isn't...), it's just that now more than ever, I'd like to veer a little 'off topic' and remember someone who – indirectly at least – put me where I am today. I wouldn't have got into hi-fi without music, and I wouldn't have got into music without John Peel. As many now doubtless know, he died last month, just sixty five years young.

Some twenty five years back (when he wasn't much older than I am now), my Dad invested in a high quality Pioneer cassette deck/Trio receiver combination, and yours truly began an odyssey of home taping which culminated in a record collection of several thousand discs. Much of the music I've spent the past twenty years buying – from Black Uhuru and Gregory Isaacs to Easterhouse and Microdisney – I first heard on BBC Radio One's John Peel Show...

To me, Peelite was an integral part of my eighties musical landscape. The sixties had seen him track the explosion of the counter culture out of rock and roll. His enduring credibility was then assured during the seventies as he successfully rode the transition from the hippie era through punk to the territory which he really made his own – what we would now call post-punk.

Growing up in the eighties it was hard to avoid the feeling that Peel was drawing the 'alternative music' map. In fact that term is probably the only description which can encompass the vast panoply of styles which he endorsed, usually simultaneously. We may think that we have catholic tastes, but we all settle down

to the tried and trusted eventually. Peel never did - his ongoing eclecticism was what made his radio persona so convincing and so compelling – he simply loved the music.

To those of us with record collections numbered in the

interesting, essentially unchanged. As a radio broadcaster his move to Radio Four was a huge success - despite *Home Truths'* frequent mawkishness Peel's genuine everyman empathy was palpable, to the extent that many people's initial reaction on hearing the sad news may have been 'damn, I

hadn't been listening to Home Truths enough recently', before thinking 'I haven't listened to the Peel show enough recently either'...

Peel was never keen on becoming a televisual

” Peel was never keen on becoming a TV personality, but his bemused, sardonic appearances on eighties Top Of The Pops are the stuff of legend...

thousands, Peel was a God-like figure. He may have received a lot of his library for free, but you just knew that he would have binned freebies which didn't meet his exacting standards, and you also knew that this was a man like us, who would be at his happiest combing through either his own collection or the contents of a record store, seeking to rediscover those elusive gems.

In many ways the eighties was the best period for Peel – in those days before rampant commercialism, multi-formatting of singles and the fragmentation of the pop market from rock it didn't feel unusual for artists such as The Jesus and Mary Chain, The Wedding Present and The House Of Love to emerge from Peel's evening program to chart success. In those days everyone of a certain age wore black - and only black - and religiously taped Peel's *Festive Fifty* come Christmas.

As 'my generation' grew older during the nineties, even if we listened to Peel less, it was reassuring to know that he was still there, still searching for the new and the

personality, but his bemused, sardonic appearances on the eighties *Top Of The Pops* are the stuff of legend. You just knew that the obvious contempt for many of the acts and certainly his Radio One DJ co-presenters was not an act. This was a man who patently knew what he felt on any given matter, and held his convictions with a passion.

In later years the BBC's Glastonbury coverage became another event difficult to imagine without his avuncular presence, and last year's footage of him down the front watching the Skatalites was hugely endearing, his boyish enthusiasm still there for all to see. Part of the enjoyment of the Glastonbury shows was his easy banter with Jo Whiley and the evident awe and respect with which she regarded him. You have to feel for Whiley, Lamacq and Kershaw, losing a mentor and having to try to fill his shoes, as well as the innumerable musicians whose lives he touched, but above all you feel for his cherished family. We all thought he was always going to be there. ●

dominic todd



You don't have to look far to see big changes going on within the hi-fi industry. As well as the usual success and sob stories at this year's Heathrow hi-fi show, much of the talk from both manufacturers and dealers alike was based around the origin of hi-fi. Not the original origin, you understand, but the country of origin. As we demonstrated in last month's issue, unprecedented growth in Far Eastern - and particularly Chinese - hi-fi has ruffled more than a few feathers over here.

Yet, as I shall come back to later, it's not all bad news for Western manufacturers. Consumers, meanwhile, now benefit from better value hi-fi components than ever before. Whilst carrying out several reviews of Far Eastern manufactured products, of late, I've constantly been struck by ever rising standards at any given price point. This isn't so much to do with improvements in technology, although this does play some part, but more the fact that one can simply build the same thing for less, half way around the world!

Admittedly, this isn't a new phenomenon - NAD has been building in Taiwan for a good quarter century - but it appears to have recently reached a critical stage. Like I say, though, this can only be a good thing for the consumer, and here are a few reasons why. The first is the Chinese built Cambridge Azur 340A. For those not yet familiar with this amp', it's a smart, fully featured, crisp sounding amplifier priced at £150. If it were built in the UK, it would probably cost at least £225. Put it another way: If you'd have spent around £150 15 years ago it would have bought you, say, an Arcam Alpha II (£180 in 1989). Now, sweet little amp' though the Alpha II was, it's really no better than a 340A and, in

some respects, not as good. In short, hi-fi consumers have had a pretty good time of it of late - if only the same had been true of house and car prices over the past 15 years...

Whilst manufacturing in the Far East has been going on for some time, in the budget arena of hi-fi, it's rather more recent further up the scale. The effect, however, is much the

“ I'm struck by the ever rising standards of Far Eastern hi-fi at any given price point... ”

same. I think it's fair to say that the South Korean, Stello DP200 DAC/preamplifier and S200 power amplifier, raise the standard at their respective £1,500 each. The same could not quite, perhaps, be said of the CAVA10, but then it certainly couldn't be denied that it offers an awful lot for the money. Furthermore, it's products such as the A10 that are only a few small tweaks away from truly threatening the establishment - and at nearly half the price.

Yet, as I mentioned earlier, all is not lost for the Western hi-fi companies that still build here. Just recently, I was quite surprised to hear that Italian high-end company, Analogue Audio, have just invested in a new multi-million pound factory in, erm, Italy. Of course, they're a fiercely proud nation there, but there is also a good deal of business sense behind the decision. As well as greater manufacturing control, less red tape and lower shipping costs, Audio Analogue has completely re-sourced many components. All the bits and bobs that go into the average hi-fi separate can soon add up - in most cases to more than the labour and factory costs - so it's little surprise

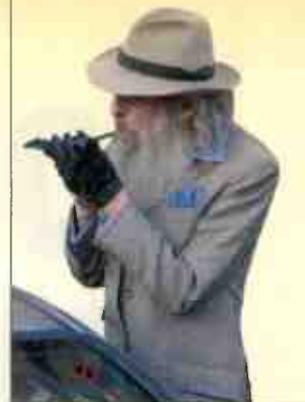
to find more Far Eastern components being used. The example I was given was that of a simple, machined, metal volume knob: the cost to make it in Europe would be six times that of the Far East. Multiply that by all the components used, and you can see that sourcing from the Far East makes huge financial sense.

What will also be encouraging for Western producing manufacturers to hear is that, although some of their products are beginning to look distinctly over priced, others are not. In fact, although more expensive, such is the quality improvement, that the price increase looks more justified than ever before. Back to our

friends at Audio Analogue and, although the new Puccini does look expensive against the opposition, it more than justifies the difference by its sublime performance. Likewise, although a Naim NAC282/NAP200 is £1,000 more expensive than the Stello, and doesn't come with an onboard DAC, it is still the better performer. What is important to note, however, is that the Puccini and Naim pre/power are two of the industries finer hi-fi moments. What manufacturers can no longer take for granted, is that particular price points can be guaranteed for substandard products.

This has to be good for you and I, and in the longer term, must surely also be good for a healthy and productive hi-fi industry. Quite frankly I'm excited about the future of hi-fi manufacturing, and those who run scared or cry foul when sales figures fall, quite often have only themselves to blame. There are plenty of hi-fi companies producing decent sales figures and decent profits. Where the product is actually built doesn't seem to make a difference: What does is simply good product and good business sense. ●

Ijk setright



It is entirely proper – as well as being interesting, illuminating, informative, and so forth – that we should profit more from listening to music than from listening to apparatus. A few mornings ago I was lying in bed, doing my best to face the coming day with equanimity, when BBC Radio 3 began to play a CD reissue of an old Andrew Davis/ BBCSO recording of the 8th symphony of Vaughan Williams. It was really good: the players were on tip-top form, the ambience was just right, the performance and the recording beyond fair criticism.

In particular, the brilliance of the scherzo (which is for wind instruments only) reminded me of another similarly crisp bit of incisive music. When I was at last on my feet I sought out a CD upon which the Gloria and other sacred music by John Rutter may be heard, with assorted forces under Stephen Layton, given the dedicated Hyperion treatment. In Gloria III, with The Wallace Collection providing truly coruscating brass, I found again that shatteringly fast hair-trigger brass articulation that I had earlier heard in the BBC Symphony Orchestra brass.

I do not believe that brass can be as fast and crisp as that. I was never a first-class performer on brass instruments, though I had a good deal of unofficial fun playing the tenor horn, but I think that I know what can be done – and this, be it The Wallace or the BBCSO collection, is better than that. For years I have offered as one of my objections to digital music the loss of 'attack' which analogue recording retains to give our ears and minds more information. Maybe, in some cases, the lack of that information is

to be preferred? Instead of telegraphing its punches, this music was just striking me without any advanced warning: it was rather like being shot at with supersonic bullets, which arrive before you hear the bang. This digital brass may have been doing the impossible, but surely it

” differences in recording quality are far greater than differences in replay systems...

was doing what the music made desirable?

So I turned to my LP collection, where the only version of the RVW 8th is one by Sir Adrian Boult and the LPO in 1969. It was a splendid performance, and far more realistic, but was the true rendition of every tongued staccato musically preferable to the supernatural brilliance of the CD? The difference might be illustrated in the reactions 'Aah!' and 'Ooh!': I found it very difficult to choose between them.

It may be that less analytical apparatus than mine (the same old assortment of Linn stuff) would upset the balance one way or the other. Certainly I have found that my equipment is ruthlessly dismissive of the puerile simplicity revealed by some rock discs, which sounded more convincing when played through the cheap and nasty mass-market things for which they were doubtless intended. Sometimes I even wonder whether the character of different brands of hi-fi is much influenced by the musical taste (or lack of it) of its designers. In that direction lie confusion and contumely, and I am not yet brave enough to explore it further.

Meanwhile it is clear that analogue LP can be jolly good, and digital CD can also (if not necessarily likewise) be jolly good. Either, at less than its best, can be a pain in my ears and an affront to my budgeting. Not nearly enough attention is paid to the fact (and I consider it to be indeed a fact) that differences in recording quality are far greater than differences in replay systems. I have some LPs that must have the angels rejoicing and sending praises further up the heavenly hierarchy; I have LPs that surely make the devils

ashamed that some mere recording engineer has done their job better. The same goes for my CDs. In either case, the best ones justify the utmost pains in buying and assembling a good hi-fi replay system, while the worst will never sound good on anything – but the difference between top-class equipment and junk is less than the difference between a good recording and a bad one.

There do seem to be some labels which offer a promise of decent quality: I mentioned Hyperion earlier in the CD connection, and I recall Heliodor being fairly trustworthy in LP days. It is time which shows the rot setting in, alas. Few LPs were to be trusted after the early 1970s, and if CD quality has taken a long time to develop I fear that it will not take long for it to be corrupted by the same crass marketing issues that eventually made anything but the best LPs anything but good. The commercial influences which lie closest to the hearts (if any) of the people in charge of music recording and distribution are again being allowed to ride roughshod over musical considerations. The future is bleak. ●

patrick cleasby



I am afraid that you are going to have to permit me one more session on the murky world of what is going on in the DVD-Audio arena before we finally move onto more exciting matters like what is going to happen with the new blue laser technology!

If you look in the hi-res software reviews section you will see that Warners have finally taken the brakes off the DVD-Audio format by releasing some new repertoire in hi-res surround. These titles are shortly to be joined by Dual Disc rehashes of some of their existing DVD-Audio titles such as the Grateful Dead's 'American Beauty'. So far, so dull. More later.

Meanwhile the last month has seen a continuation of Universal's policy split between the U.S. and the rest of the world. They have no intention to release DVD-Audio in any form over here, but November 23rd will see a nice initial set of Dual Disc releases in the States. It is here that my previous suspicions start to be realised. Have a look at <http://consumers.umusic.com/dd/releases.html> to see what I mean. We may be due to get a lovely SACD of Keane's 'Hopes And Fears' here shortly, but our American brethren will get a Dual Disc with videos. BUT, the considerable downside is that space can only be afforded for a CD resolution stereo track. Oh Dear.

With the exception of the uniformly 24/48 Nine Inch Nails disc, (which is available in an SACD version with a very interesting second disc of extras the Dual Disc lacks), all the titles have strange differences in resolution between their stereo and surround tracks. The juggling act necessary to squeeze onto the DVD-A side of a Dual Disc

has resulted in a real mish-mash of quality.

That might be confusing, but Warners Dual Disc launch with The Donnas was a catastrophic cock up. Nothing wrong with the DVD-A side – it is every bit the equal in spec. of the discrete DVD-Audio reviewed in these pages. Amazingly, quality

“ **the juggling act necessary to squeeze stereo and surround onto the DVD-A side of a Dual Disc has resulted in a real mish-mash of quality...**

control allowed the CD side to be released with the last track ending after a few seconds – beyond belief! Naturally the disc was withdrawn after a few short days on the market – it remains to be seen whether, or how soon it will be re-authored.

Warners seem to have been on the point of going with flipper technology over here, (Simple Plan's album, released at the same time as The Donnas, bears a sticker explaining the contents of the 'CD Side' and the 'DVD Side' but is also in fact a CD/DVD-A dual pack), but for whatever reason (nobody is talking yet) they have embarked on the oft-preferred dual pack route. Don't bank on seeing any Dual Discs over here anytime soon...

The ridiculous thing is that I have still only seen one Dual Disc, and that fleeting. Before the mastering SNAFU emerged I missed a great opportunity to purloin The Donnas from <http://cheap-cds.com>, (anyone fancying those Universal Dual Disc titles should check there, they are cheap and they ship to the U.K.),

ahead of the disc being withdrawn but my eagerness to seek freebies from my Stateside Warners contacts lead me astray. I guess my first will have to be Keane...Serves me right!

Thankfully I will have the CD quality stereo on the DVD-A side to listen to, as I risk not being able to play the CD side. As the owner of a Toshiba SD900E DVD-Audio player it will probably not play ball with the CD content – anecdotal reports suggest that its American cousin the SD9200 refuses to, and Denons might be suspect too. It is strange that the CD side is causing the problems – based on historical experience one might have expected the DVD-Audio content to be the one causing player

difficulties. However the American Pioneer machine which had difficulty with many recent DVD-A titles, the 563A, is rumoured to have problems with BOTH sides of Dual Disc!

Failure to play in domestic DVD-A or universal players is not a big problem as long as DVD-A playback works. But confidence in the new format is likely to be hit hard with Pioneer, Sony and Onkyo all issuing advisory notices to the effect that Dual Disc should not be played on any of their CD-capable hardware due to concerns over non-functioning or even the possibility of player or disc damage.

I never thought I'd say this but at least we can look forward to a raft of nice, safe back catalogue SACDs from Universal – 5 Eltons and 3 Claptons should keep the hi-res contingent happy while we wait to see if the Dual Disc camp can get a coordinated plan together. As a music fan I can only hope the format doesn't die before the planned release of the complete Talking Heads in the format next spring. ●

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rio time

MP3 players are back, having won the lives of Apple's iPod, and other flash-memory machines are being overhauled. Rio's Chiba is one such device and is familiar with listeners, and better than ever.

It must be tough for Rio. Although they were one of the first producers of MP3 players, they now find themselves competing against, on the one hand, the might of the iPod and, on the other, a torrent of new Chinese players. The Chiba looks promising, though. The 256MB memory is fine for a small, flash-type, machine.

Better still, it is expandable by another 512MB thanks to a SD/MMC card slot. For those of you baffled by the figures, 256MB equates to around 60 songs at 128kbps on MP3. As with most MP3 players, the Chiba will also record WMA files, but not the codec favoured by Apple - AAC. Also part of the spec are a handy FM tuner, equalizer, carry clip and, most impressively of all, a pair of fine Sennheiser MX300 headphones. Although easy to use,

I did find the Chiba rather plasticky and at £149 it's not cheap either. When you consider that the Apple iPod Mini, with far sexier styling and greater memory, can be had for only another £30 or so, it doesn't look good value for money. That having been said, if you shop around, then the Rio could be yours for more like £110 or less.

I found the Chiba easy to use. The standard iTunes software helped a great deal, but this is still one of the more user-friendly designs, despite the less than rapid USB 1.1 connection. Less terrific was the battery life, though. It's claimed to be around 18 hours but, in practice, is less than half this - you'll certainly need a good stock of rechargeables. Cut and about the tiny size and non-skip flash memory system were a boon. This is one MP3 player that you can truly take anywhere. Less good with extended use, however, was the battery cover. The softly textured plastic feels good to touch, but always seemed to come adrift in my pocket - annoying.

To give the Rio a fighting chance of sounding good, I recorded most of the tracks onto the Chiba at 192kbps. Although, as we'll discover, the sound is certainly better, it does limit the track storage to around 40. Listening to Toni Braxton's 'Tell Me' certainly gave a good initial impression of the player. It was, at 192 rate, surprisingly dynamic with a stronger than usual bass response. The vocal timbre was fine and the timing wasn't bad either. I have to say that, whilst I usually abhor such devices, the 5-band graphic equaliser actually worked very well - especially when particular types of background noise need blocking out.

Some of the quality, I suspected, was due to the headphones, and further experimentation proved this to be true. Listening to the Chiba through hi-fi separates showed the player as being rather thin and weedy sounding, and pretty veiled to boot. Likewise, using the same headphones with an elderly portable CD player of mine, I found a far greater level of detail, decay and layering of sound. Nevertheless, we must remember that this is a compressed format, and that none of the Rio's rivals would do any better, at least when using this sort of bitrate.

Generally the sound had decent body, fine dynamics and a reasonable open and engaging quality. Switching to 128kbps, as usual, saw a marked drop in quality, however. The sound

was more distant and rather closed in. It was far less powerful, and the general blur and confusion made for a less than pleasant listen. Again, by the standards of rivals, the sound was fine, but if it were my player, I'd stick to 192kbps.

Despite this, when I first got hold of it, mistaking the Chiba for a remote garage door activator, I actually came to quite like the plasticky tot. The decent display (some rivals don't even have one at all), and fine ergonomics made it one of the easier MP3 players to use. Loose battery cover aside, it all works very well. Thanks to the headphones and, dare I say it, the graphic equaliser, much the same can be said for the sound quality too. It's no CD portable, or even an AAC encoded iPod or iRiver for that matter. Yet, it still manages to sound dynamic, reasonably open and, most importantly, involving. If you can afford the extra I would still recommend the iPod Mini, but for those that need something tiny and totally shock-proof, the Rio Chiba is one of the better flash-memory devices.



VERDICT 
A small, well-equipped, decent sounding and generally likeable MP3 player. Usual MP3 codec failings won't make it the audiophile's first choice, though.

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in vogue

Patrick Cleasby assesses the remastered entirety of Japan's recorded output, along with David Sylvian's early solo career...

photograph: NICOLA TYSON



comment on the debut 'Adolescent Sex' was, "It's embarrassing, isn't it?" Well, it may be, but it is also interesting to experience the musical roots of the unique band which would later make such individual music. Strange though it is to hear Sylvian's sneering drawl when you're more used to his later style it is still an enjoyably rocky album. There are

Japan were always a very distinctive band, in both of their major phases. Historically they were not well served by the transition to CD, so it was encouraging to see attractive, well-mastered editions of the seminal Virgin catalogue reissued last year. These were joined by similar digipak editions of the first few David Sylvian solo releases which were originally collated nearly fifteen years ago in the desirable 'Weatherbox' box set. Finally there was Rain Tree Crow, the album on which the Japan members reconvened in 1991.

The release this year of digipak editions of the four Japan albums released on the Hansa label has completed the picture and the hope was that it would witness some of the more notorious errors committed during that catalogue's time on the budget BMG label. I am not quite sure how Virgin's managed to master that label's 'In Vogue' compilation entirely in mono, but trust me, it still happens!

BMG claim that since the first time that the early material has been transferred from correctly sourced original tapes. Not only that, but it is the first time that many of these albums have been readily available on CD. The discs all have extensive

sleevenotes and historical artwork, with many audio and video bonuses, the latter thankfully supplied with Mac launchers, and looking good enough in Video CD quality MPEG-1 to be worth transferring to disc for TV viewing. For all of these albums except 'Quiet Life' the only stereo reference I have is the fifteen year old 'Souvenir From Japan' compilation CD, and sonically there is a vast improvement in fidelity. Either some cleaning up has been done or some of the tape noise on the compilation was the result of multi-generational masters.

For the uninitiated the band made their debut as a glam-influenced five piece, and continued in the same configuration until guitarist Rob Dean left after the first Virgin album 'Cathedral' (aka 'Polaroids'), leaving the classic four piece 'Tin Drum' / 'Rain Tree Crow' line up of David Sylvian, his brother Steve Jansen on drums, Richard Barbieri on keyboards and Mick Karn on bass.

Many of the band members would probably prefer to dismiss their early growing stages. Sylvian certainly would, and when I caught up with Richard Barbieri at a recent Porcupine Tree album launch and had the opportunity to ask what he thought of the BMG reissue plans he's

no bonus tracks on this one, but it is very difficult to imagine now what, in 1978, the world must have made of the pretty boys featured in the four well-transferred videos on this disc – as the sleevenotes say, they

photograph: Steve Jansen, February 1981





just didn't fit.

But the band persisted in the same vein for another album before they slowly began to morph into the art-rockers they became. Even twenty years ago, when I first heard it in its entirety 'Obscure Alternatives' was a pleasant surprise. Once again from 1978, Karn's transition to fretless bass means that the signature Japan sound is starting to emerge. This time the bonuses are four reasonable live tracks and a video for 'Sometimes I Feel So Low'.

The third album is where things start to get really interesting. 1979's 'Quiet Life' is a great album, and accordingly has been available on CD before. If you own Camden's 2001 reissue than you really are going to need the new version. The correct album version of the title track is restored to the running order, there are more bonuses, now including a video of the title track, and this new remastering really does show that the last one was taken from a vastly inferior source. On the other hand if bonuses are not your thing and you own the 1986 Japanese Victor pressing, as is often the way with discs of that provenance and age, it is every bit as good (usually speaking as the 2004 version, as you can probably afford to stick with it). This is the best album that you really must own to call yourself a fan of this band.

THE VIRGIN YEARS

After 'Quiet Life' the band descended to Virgin, and it was their later success which really confirmed things, as Hansa rushed to catch in by compiling all these hard-to-find Japan

singles and outtakes into 'Assemblage' (1981), and cluttering Virgin's release strategy with singles such as 'I Second That Emotion'. It is a collection which is worth having however, with tracks of the quality of the Giorgio Moroder-produced 'Life In Tokyo', and also 'European Son'. Bonuses on the reissue include alternate versions, and a couple of videos. If you're wondering whether the early Japan is for you, this is the place to start.

To summarise the BMG remasters it seems that as exhaustive an effort as is humanly possible has been put into assembling them, constituting a bargain for the budget prices at which they can be found. Buy 'Assemblage' and work backwards.

Moving on to the Virgin years, and as Japan were still big news in the early days of CD they were among the label's first acts to get the treatment. This was not great news, as along with initial Genesis and XTC CDs the packaging was abysmal, and the sonics often just as bad. There was a reasonable compilation, 'Excessively Glorious' which has long since disappeared, and initial versions of the live 'Oil On Canvas' dropped a track in order to squeeze onto a single disc.

All of these oversights have now been remedied. We start with the Virgin debut 'Grodman Like Polanski', which Barbieri thinks has benefited most from the excellent re-mastering of Tony Cousins at Metropolis. The album was produced, as was 'Quiet Life' by John Potter, and contains many Japan classics such as the title track and 'Nightporter'. It

is enhanced in its new version by hitherto hard-to-find instrumentals from Richard Barbieri and Rob Dean, as well as a Steve Nye remix of 'Taking Islands In Africa'. I have to concur with Richard, although the original MPO CD pressing is tolerable, this does sound better. The artwork has been subtly changed with alternate takes from the original sessions too.

Of course the largest milestone in Japan's career is the second Virgin album 'Tin Drum'. It is here that the oriental influences come to the fore along with some of Karn's most frenetic bass stylings, and it is also here that Sylvian's productive collaboration with Steve Nye (a onetime member of the Penguin Café Orchestra) began. Virgin have really gone to town with the package on this one, with more alternate artwork on the clamshell box, which contains an attractive book of photos, the original album sequence in a digipak with the original cover, and a 'mini Jap' replica sleeved 'Art Of Parties' single which contains alternate versions and original B side 'Life Without Buildings'. Once again the sonics shade the original MPO CD – in this day and age it is almost a relief to find that the original sound of the album has not been artificially boosted or coloured.

The valedictory live album 'Oil On Canvas' has been allowed to become a double once again, and although by no means essential it is nice to complete the set. Each disc is bookended by original instrumentals, and in one case an excellent rerecorded 'Nightporter'. Virgin have done some great work in funding a top class remastering of an important catalogue, and in dressing it up in attractive digipacks with useful extras, but I can't help feeling it to be a shame that these high class transfers have not (yet) been preserved in Hybrid SACD form at the very least. Although I have been told not to expect high resolution versions in the short term it is to be hoped that if EMI continue to exploit the EMI vaults for all-round reissues, we shall have a chance of ultimately seeing multi-channel versions of some of these fine albums.

SYLVIAN SOLO

One of the reasons that Japan's work was received so much wider attention is that one band gave David Sylvian his start in music. From leaving the band he propelled himself into producing some of the most vibrant contemporary music



available, and so naturally Virgin have rounded out this reissue program with his most important work. The three albums and an EP which Sylvian released between 1984 and 1988 still have a powerful influence on lovers of other-worldly rock and ambient music and deserve reappraisal and discovery by new generations of fans.

1984 saw Sylvian on Top Of The Pops again with the lead single from his enchanting debut 'Brilliant Trees', the misleadingly up-tempo and poppy, although distinctly angular 'Rec Guitar'. How the pop fans must have wailed when they heard the long, contemplative meanderings of the album! In his recent conversation with me Bill Nelson compared Sylvian to Miles Davis in his supreme ability to assemble casts of stellar sidemen and coax winning performances out of them, and that work started here with the first collaboration with Can man Holger Czukay, providing here sampling in the form of short wave radio snippets amongst other things. This 'found sounds' approach persists through to next album proper 'Gone To Earth', with its very Fripp-y spoken word sampling. Of course Czukay was to go on to collaborate with Sylvian on two intriguing instrumental albums for the Venture label, which are not covered here, and have not been reissued yet.

Sylvian followed his debut with the 'Words With The Shaman', an instrumental EP. As the one the cassette version added a lengthy installation piece, one of Sylvian's first Robert Fripp collaborations, 'Steel Cathedral: The Casket As A Index of Possibilities', and so was disc two of the 'Weatherbox' set, which inserted more recent instrumental pieces. This is the same configuration which is now released as a separate digital. It makes for a very satisfying instrumental diversion, although iPod

owners should be urged to join the three parts of 'Words...' to avoid irritating gaps in the continuity of the piece!

In 1986 Sylvian was to drop 'Gone To Earth', a daunting double album on us, and early CD adopters such as myself had to suffer the dropping of several tracks from the second, instrumental disc in order to squeeze it onto one disc. No longer. Robert Fripp and Bill Nelson add dense and delicate guitars respectively, and the vocal and instrumental discs are in turn intense and meditative.

It is almost impossible to convey the depth of my admiration for the acoustic, song-based 'Secrets Of The Beehive', so all I will say is that if you only buy one of these discs, buy this one. It is quite simply one of the most exquisite, beautifully recorded sets of songs ever released. As a bonus the previously Japanese-reissue-only 'Promise (The Cult Of Eurydice)' is every bit as good as the rest of the album. Just compare Danny Thompson's bass sound on the new versions of this record and 'Brilliant Trees' to establish how much better than the 'Weatherbox' equivalents these versions sound.

So the culmination of this ten year career arc was Sylvian's first true masterpiece. In these days of artists treading water over long periods of time it is amazing to think that Sylvian came so far in so short a period of time. 'Secrets Of The Beehive' was succeeded by a triumphant world tour 'In Praise Of Shaman', for which both Jansen and Barbieri were in the band (Incidentally there is currently a live version of the sublime 'Orpheus' available for download at www.silvian.com). Presumably this collaboration led, directly or indirectly to the four 'Tin Drum' era Japan members reassembling to make the 'Rain Tree Crow' album, released

in 1991. The reissue adds the B side to the beguiling 'Blackwater'; 'I Drink To Forget', and as usual the remastering job adds justified bottom end weight when compared to the thirteen year old CD. Although it is a refined album, ultimately it was a slight disappointment, particularly as the experience proved so divisive that there has been little collaboration between Sylvian and Jansen-Barbieri-Karn (who continued to record under that name) since. Sylvian continues to work with his brother, and Robert Fripp's online diary reports that he has recently done some guitar sessions for them.

'Rain Tree Crow' marks the end of this reissue run-down, but Sylvian has only released three original song albums in the thirteen years since its release, and that count includes the Sylvian/Fripp album. Of course there have also been his many rejigged compilations and two versions of the Sylvian/Fripp live album 'Damage'. There have been signs of the brilliance so ably demonstrated in these four solo records, but generally the feeling has been that he became mired in his collaborations and difficult solo projects. The hope has to be that his new-found independence will enable him to recapture his former glory.

photograph: Kevin Westenberg, January 2000



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Mark Levinson 31.5 Transport	£4,995.00	£9,600.00
Theta Pro Genie	£495.00	£1,295.00
Acoustic Arts Drive I/Dac I mk II	£1,095.00	£6,500.00
Linn Sondec CD12	£7,995.00	£12,000.00
Linn UNIDISK 1.1	£1,095.00	£6,500.00
Roksan Caspian CD	£995.00	£1,500.00
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YBA CD1 Delta (Twin psu)	£3,995.00	£5,500.00
Audiomeca Damnation CD Transport	£750.00	£1,600.00
Primare V20 DVD/CD	£750.00	£1,000.00
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Primare V25 CD/DVD	£1,095.00	£1,000.00
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Turntables & analogue

SME Series V Arm "new"	£1,400.00	£1,650.00
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Nottingham Analogue Dayas (Broyer arm)	ASK	£3,273.53
SME 20/2A "new"	£10,495.00	£12,900.00
SME 30/2A "new"	£10,495.00	£12,900.00
PS Audio Power Plant 300 + Ultimate Outlet	£1,300.00	£1,900.00
Nottingham Analogue "The Analogue" 12" arm and deck	£4,495.00	£8,000.00
Fanfare FT1 Tuner	£595.00	£1,500.00
Tara Labs 10m Bal The 2 Interconnect	£2,000.00	£5,000.00
Tara Labs FGS (Mono) pair	£500.00	£1,000.00
Roksan Xerxes 10/DS1.5/Artemiz Jubilee	£1,300.00	£4,500.00
Ortofon Jubilee	ASK	£1,500.00
Roksan Caspian Phono se	£1,095.00	£950.00
Roksan TMS2/ Artemiz	£1,095.00	£8,500.00
Michell Orbe/ VC/ RB300	ASK	£2,350.00
Project RPM 6 "new"	£1,095.00	£500.00
Project RPM9/ arm	£1,095.00	£1,000.00
VPI TMT mk IV/ Rockport 6000/ Flywheel/ VPI Stand/ Clearaudio Accurate/ Pump etc. "new"	£8,500.00	£16,000.00
Roksan Radius 5 (Acrylic/ Nima arm "new"	£1,095.00	£850.00
Loricraft record cleaning machine	£1,300.00	£1,100.00
Earmax Pro	£425.00	£ -
Moth Record Cleaning m/c	£395.00	£ -
Project RPM4/ Ortofon 510 "new"	£245.00	£325.00
Ortofon Rohmann	£1,095.00	£1,050.00
Ortofon Kontrapunkt a/b "new"	£1,095.00	£500.00/ £750.00
Michell Gyro SE/ RB300 "new"	ASK	£1,100.00
Audio Synthesis Phono Eq mm/mc	£495.00	£ -
Pink Triangle PT Ext psu	£495.00	£ -
Pinus 14 Phono "new"	£1,195.00	£2,750.00
Nackamichi DR 3	£195.00	£400.00
Tom Evans - The Groove "new"	ASK	£1,795.00
Clear Audio Reference Mc phono stage X-demo	£1,695.00	£2,065.00
Clear Audio Symphono phono stage X-demo MM/MC	£640.00	£740.00

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world awards 2004

turntables

WINNER NOTTINGHAM ANALOGUE SPACEDECK £889.75

Tom Fletcher has been designing and manufacturing turntables for over thirty years, and this latest incarnation of his Nottingham Analogue Spacedeck is a superb transcription tool. You'll not find a more passionate advocate of analogue audio than he, and this enthusiasm extends to every small detail of the deck's design – which is brilliantly complete. It boasts rather unusual construction – three separate pillars resting on a composite resin turntable platform (which measures 360mm deep, 455 wide and 50mm thick) are used to obviate any airborne or structure borne vibration. The turntable is placed on top of this platform along with the separate, offboard motor. Levelling the deck is simplicity itself – thanks to the two adjustable feet. The motor is a deliberately low torque 24 pole AC synchronous item, totally isolated from the platter via a conventional rubber drive belt. Tom Fletcher has engineered the deck so it has the option of holding an additional pick up arm mount, so the user can use two arms with the turntable. Sonically, the key defining characteristics of the Nottingham Analogue Spacedeck are space, speed and evenness. It's a particularly open, expansive and dimensional deck with real rhythmic aplomb – in a way it

reminds one of the old eighties Roksan Xerxes, but with a good deal more detail and textural integrity. The Spacedeck does not dig out subterranean bass frequencies but does not suffer from bass overhang. This fast yet neutral audio footprint is addictive; the closest rival in this sense is Michell's GyroDec SE, which offers an even more transparent and self effacing sound, but arguably a slightly slower and more mechanical one too. Its most obvious sonic attribute is that

of timing – this is an extremely pacy product. Attack transients are superb, as is the way notes decay. It's unusual to hear such a sound from a belt drive deck. You'll not find the generous 'vinyl-like' euphony of the Linn here, or the slight warmth of the Origin Live – rather, it displays rifle-bolt precision which music fans will love, although folk who seek sweet and sumptuous ought to look elsewhere. A fine example of an exceptionally capable engineer's art.



RUNNER UP: REGA P5 £700

Rega turntables are a brilliant example of that old adage, 'less is more'. This is beautifully yet simply designed, with high quality materials and an excellent finish. Providing you place it carefully, it turns in a sound that's unremittingly open and clean, with oodles of detail, depth and definition. It's best as an all-in-one package complete with one of Rega's own fine cartridges – just pull it out of the box, plug in and play. Gorgeous.



tonearm

WINNER:

HADCOCK GH242 EXPORT
£499

Hadcock tonearms have been around largely unchanged since the nineteen seventies. For some reason, possibly linked to marketing, PR or hi-fi politics, for a long while they became unfashionable - their 'classic' design being seen as a hindrance, rather than a help. In truth, the GH242 Export is as close as the original 228 as the latest Ekos is to the original Linn Ittok LVI - which means it's the same basic design, but refined dramatically. Don't think of this as 'an old arm', as something quaint, 'retro' or anachronistic - it is none of these. Rather, the Hadcock is the best value tonearm currently on sale, no less, and one of the most superior sounding too. But, to that list of superlatives, you can also add most 'quirky', 'fiddly' and 'fussy' too - a 'plug and play' Origin Live OL1 it is not! It's a unipivot with an effective



two balance weights. These counter-weights are also decoupled and have the same finish as the pedestal. The effective mass of the arm is 10g.

ease, displaying a grip of the music that is rarely equalled. It also presents subtle details as well as a very wide dynamic range. Stereo

“don't think of this as quaint, 'retro' or anachronistic - it is none of these...”

length of 212.8mm and a slender aluminium arm tube. The headshell is fashioned from cast aluminium and is attached to the arm with a single cap head bolt. The chromium-bearing pedestal is burnished to a very fine finish. The pedestal supports the arm lift assembly (one of the best we've ever used!) as well as the anti-skate mechanism. The rear arm stub is of the decoupled variety and carries

Pickup arm alignment is accurate and the headshell-offset angle is 23 degrees. It can accommodate almost any cartridge with a weight within the range of 3-12gms. The top arm can be completely detached, because of this feature it is extremely easy to mount cartridges. This is a very fine arm as far as aesthetics go, and its build quality is second to none. Sonically, the Hadcock tracks with

imaging is famously expansive, with the image melting the listening room walls away. Image placement is also rock-solid. It has such a large, feisty and vibrant sound, yet is a natural music maker with a rare ability to get you into the groove. It's a versatile, well thought out and flexible tool that's ideal for vinyl enthusiasts prepared to take the (considerable) time it takes to set-up, align and fine tune. There's absolutely nothing old hat about the Hadcock - it's a stunner!



RUNNER UP:
ROKSAN NIMA £350

Forget Blu-Ray, DVD-Audio and DAB - who'd have thought that 2004 would be the year of the unipivot tonearm? The Hadcock is a brilliant precision instrument with looks and ergonomics from the old school - while the Nima brings unipivots well and truly into the 21st century. It's simple to set up, requires almost no fettling, looks unerringly cool and sounds the part too. It's a very musical and beguiling performer in a way that no Rega (or derivative multipivot) can be, and offers a good deal of the Hadcock magic in a far more user-friendly, and cheaper, package.

cartridge

WINNER:

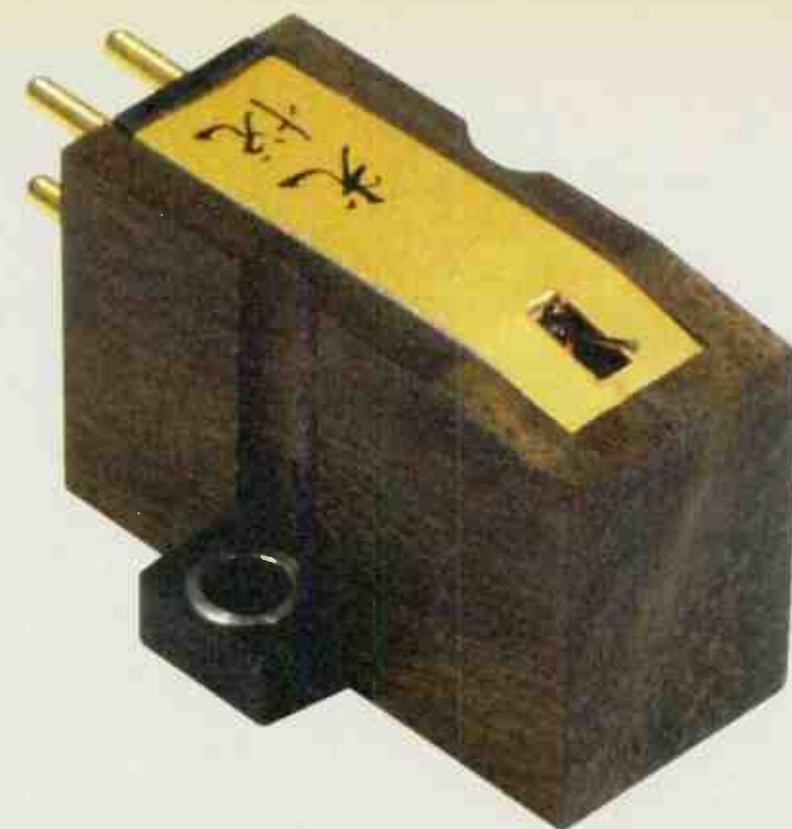
KOETSU ROSEWOOD £1,499

Koetsu Red: of all the world's great moving coils, there is none that can compare.... Here's a truly remarkable sounding coil that's priced low enough for mere mortals to afford – just! Yoshiaki Sugano formed Koetsu after his time with Supex, where he designed the classic SD900. He sadly died in 2002, and with it the original generation of Koetsu cartridges, but his magic lives on with this, the company's entry-level design. In short, it's the most musical device at or anywhere near the price – it has a rare 'magical' quality that makes vinyl so obviously more emotional, more affecting and more moving than anything digital ever made. Whereas rivals can (and do) outshine it in terms of detail, bass grip, finesse, treble extension, all of this pails into nothing when you play this cartridge – suddenly (as the song says) you're lost in music, caught in a trap – and there really is no turning back. When you've lived with one of these, even the best rival transducers sound like CD at thirty

degrees below zero.

The most important, overriding attribute of the Red is its

immediacy. The music is more upfront, more tactile than greats such as Ortofon's £1,000 Kontrapunkt C [see **RUNNER UP**]. It lacks the Scandinavian MC's beautifully tidy, smooth, cultured, hi-fi sound and instead is much more like being



there - right in front of the orchestra, band or singer. The reason for this is - in part - the Koetsu's startling attack transients. Listen to a simple drum beat and it has rhythm and inflection (i.e. timing and dynamics). It's brilliant at both, making the (admittedly cheaper)

and loving it. As for tonality, the Koetsu pulls off the impressive feat of sounding both rich and deep, but relatively neutral too. Its warm, sumptuous tonality isn't easily reducible to its frequency response trace - it's not obviously aberrant. Yet its portrayal of acoustic instruments

“here's one of the most innately musical phono pick-up cartridges yet made”

Ortofon sound like it's just serving time. It sings with a carefree joy that I've not encountered with any other moving coil anywhere near the price, if at all. It succeeds by making any given recording sound like a group of musicians playing live music together,

and voices on all-analogue recordings is exquisite. Here's one of the most innately musical phono pick-up cartridges yet made. So charismatic, endearing, charming, seductive and yet so nearly without vice - it deserves our highest possible score.

RUNNER UP:

ORTOFON KONTRAPUNKT C £1,000

This is the alter ego of the Koetsu Red – despite being considerably cheaper, many casual listeners would mark this down as being the more expensive of the two. It's obviously more finessed and 'sophisticated' sounding – a bit like US high end kit, if you get my drift. Yet despite the unremittingly 'proper' presentation, brilliant tracking and oh-so-well ordered nature, it's also a deeply pleasant thing to live with. Detailing and dynamics are as good as anything at twice the price, and this makes for a very engaging and enjoyable vinyl experience indeed. A tad too Scandinavian (i.e. tidy) sounding for some, but we love and respect it for precisely this.



phonostage

WINNER

WHEST AUDIO PS20/MSU20
£1,250

One of the very best phonostages we've ever heard; not merely the best this year. It offers unmatched smoothness and openness, and detail and insight that have to be heard to be believed. That it comes from a relatively new and unknown British specialist manufacturer is all the more surprising. London-based James Henriot is the man behind Whest Audio. An audio engineer who has designed for both the professional and domestic audio fields, he specialises in professional live sound recording and audio research and development. The £899 DAP.10 'discrete analog processor', reviewed in the July 2004 issue of *Hi-Fi World*, was his first product - and what a revelation it proved too - but this phonostage is in a league above even this! The package contains the PS.20 phono preamplifier and the MsU.20 power supply. As per Trichord's Delphini, they're connected to one another by an umbilical cord terminated by metal DIN plugs, Naim-style. The MsU.20 has an IEC input with its own integral on-off switch, although is supposed to be left on all the time, and on the front a pinhole sized red LED. The PS.20 is



“a landmark product for analogue addicts”

interesting inasmuch as it has a pair of RCA output sockets, a pair of RCA sockets, and a pair of RCA loading sockets. The idea is that you select the gain (MM or MC) on the rear-mounted switch and plug in the correct pair of loading plugs for your

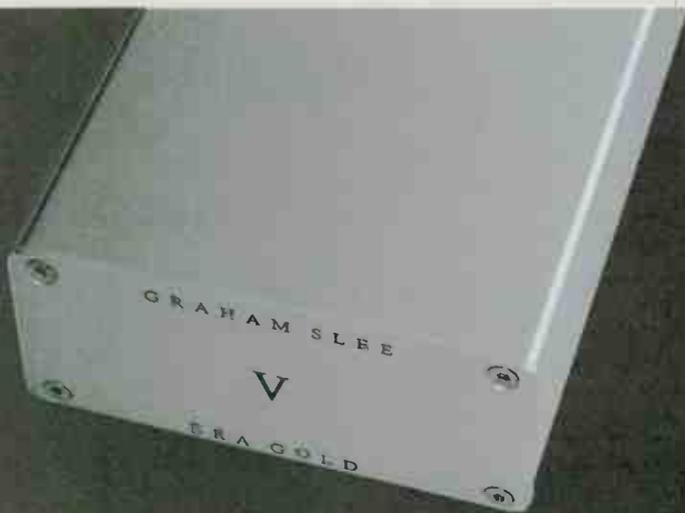
cartridge (which Whest supplies at the time of purchase). Sonically, the Whest slices through poor pressings or recordings like a hot knife through butter, projects vocals amazingly, and

hangs instruments back when needed. It appears to have dramatically lower distortion and a wider window on the world with greater depth of field, than any of its price rivals. So much faster, it's also more dimensional with obviously superior soundstaging,

image articulation and left-to-right image placement. Most significant is its utterly neutral tonality. Bass is strong and supple, but not boomy or overhung, midband glass-clear and treble sparkling, delicate and with breathtaking speed. Overall, this is a deeply special phonostage; its combination of dizzying depth, dimensionality, grip, speed and evenness allied tremendous textural accuracy make it a landmark product for analogue addicts.

RUNNER UP:
GRAHAM SLEE ERA GOLD V £460

The Era Gold V is said the result of many years of research and development by Graham Slee, a professional design engineer from the broadcast audio industry. It accepts almost any moving iron pick up cartridge and comes housed in a very smart alloy sleeve. This brand is not famous, but deserves to be. If a relaxed, yet engagingly rhythmic, presentation is what you seek, with smoothness and dimensionality - then look no further. A product that neither diminishes nor exaggerates the performance; rather it displays the music even handedly, yet with great gusto.



CD player



WINNER:

NAIM CD5i £825

Naim Audio's 2004 range is undoubtedly the strongest it's ever been – and the new CD5i shows just how convincing the company now is in the 'entry level audiophile' stakes. It's ostensibly a CD5 with a smattering of stuff from the new CDX2. From the former comes that exquisite die-cast zinc and aluminium (70x432x301mm)

casework, crisp green LED display and tactile, backlit control buttons. This is one of the coolest looking CD spinners around - exquisitely hewn, it has the beautiful feel of an SME tonearm or Leica camera.

Inside, there's the same suspended transport and low mass magnetic puck clamping system. Paths between critical components are designed to be as short as possible, with great attention paid to earthing and mains issues. There are fourteen low-noise, regulated power supplies on the

main circuit board, separate digital and analogue transformer windings plus additional screening to reduce the intrusion of RF interference. From the CDX2 comes a glass-reinforced front loading drawer mechanism, and there are RCA phono sockets alongside the company's traditional DIN sockets. By Naim standards, it has a tremendously accessible and open sound -

boots on. Bass is never less than strong, firm and insistent; the CD5i remains consistent regardless of whatever else it is asked to play further up the audio band. It simply holds fast whatever's going on elsewhere, the result being a brilliant sense of natural musicality. It sounds less like a CD player, and more like music. The company's new entry-level machine displays superlative (and we

"It sounds less like a CD player and more like music... for the money, nothing compares..."

super fast, focused, detailed and propulsive right across the audio band. There's simply no denying that this machine is faster, tighter, more grippy and engaging than the best of the rest at the price - transient ability is dizzying, and makes rivals seem ponderous and vague, as if they were dancing ballet with hobnail

use the word deliberately) build and ergonomics, a welcome few sensible facilities and deeply convincing sound. By reducing the price to £825, Naim has made a more distinct niche for the 5i, where it looks even more of a bargain than its slightly pricier progenitor. Simply put – for the money, nothing compares...

RUNNER UP:

3DACOUSTICS SHANLING SCD-T203C £2,150

Surely the most charismatic digital disc spinner around, this tries (and largely succeeds) to touch all bases a serious audiophile could possibly want. It's interestingly styled, superbly built, has no superfluous (but many useful) features, great operational flexibility and great sound. Sonically, it's not quite up to the top £1,000 machines as a CD player, but is extremely listenable all the same, and as an SACD spinner it's peerless at the price – especially via the tube output stage. Far sweeter, warmer and more analogue sounding than anything we've heard at the price; some may find it too much so, others may never be able to go back.



DVD player



WINNER:
ARCAM DV79 £1,000

The sight of Arcam's latest DVD spinner causes few surprises – it's a smart, unprepossessing, skilfully built and well-presented machine in the quintessentially English mould. What delights is when you switch it on then look or listen, and suddenly you realise how special it is. Put simply, if you want something that plays CDs as well (if not better) than most high quality CD spinners on the market – and plays DVDs of the video and Audio variety (but not SACD) with equal panache – then this is your machine. It's not the best performer at the price in any isolated respect, but is peerless in the way it combines so many strengths for the modest outlay. The DV79 is well

specified too - Dolby ProLogic II decoding and an HDMI link both join the Arcam party – but of more interest to audiophiles are the toroidal mains transformer, 32-bit Zoran audio DSP, Wolfson WM8740 DACs and low jitter clock. There's an easygoing nature to the Arcam that means music simply washes over the

from the likes of Naim and Exposure. The Arcam makes a fine job of separating instruments, showing a degree of maturity unmatched by other DVD players of this price. Ultimately bass response is a little soft and fulsome, but still outshines anything comparable in the DVD market. Best of all, here's a DVD

“it's peerless in the way it combines so many strengths for the modest outlay”

listener. It's precise too - anyone used to standard CD will still be impressed, especially compared with rival universal DVD players from the likes of Denon or Pioneer which are both obviously compromised in their 'legacy' 16/44 Red Book CD replay. Indeed, its soundstaging and instrument positioning is every bit as good as its best bespoke CD rivals

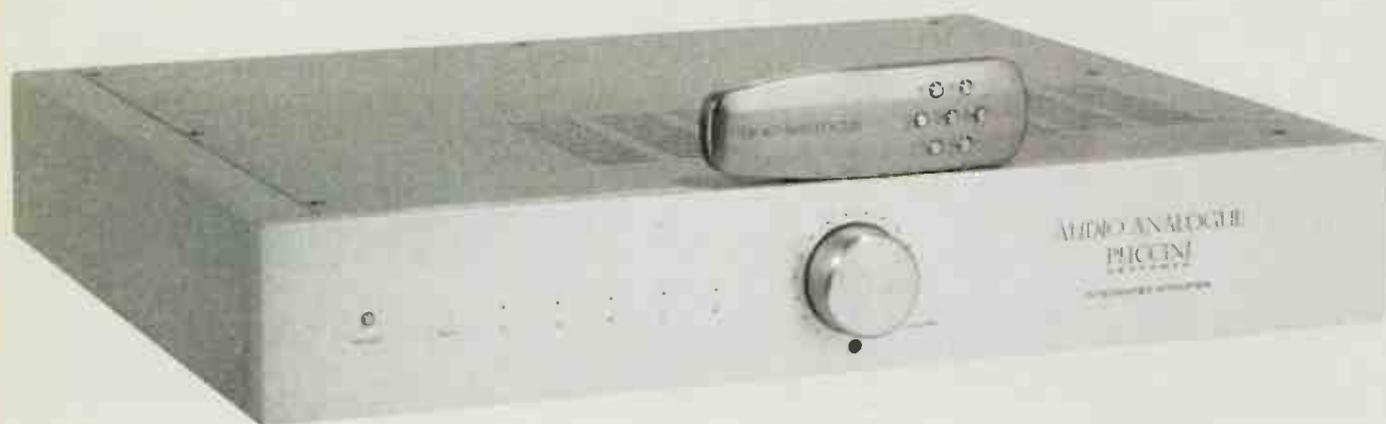
spinner that really is genuinely exciting to listen to via 16bit, and rarely feels like a poor relation to any sub £1,000 CD spinner. Factor in its fantastic DVD picture quality with plenty of depth and texture, the wonderful ergonomics, great (albeit rather sober) looks and the Arcam DVD79 is cracking value – and one of the company's best products to date.



RUNNER UP:
LINN UNIDISK 1 £6,500

This is the company's first, most expensive and highest performing universal disc player. Offering multichannel and/ or stereo sound from CD, DVD-Video, DVD-Audio and SACD, it's Linn's statement high resolution digital source, using all in-house technology – and it shows. There's no other universal player that sounds so good with CD – and yet the Unidisk is brilliantly accomplished with every other format too. It's diminutive, deliciously styled, boasts superb connectivity and fearsome sonics no matter what you play on it. Expensive, but few will ever need – or want - more.

integrated amplifier



WINNER: AUDIO ANALOGUE PUCCHINI SETTANTA £975

Audio Analogue's first Puccini amplifier was a god, the second merely accomplished. In this, its third Settanta incarnation, designer Marco Manunta has pulled the marque back to the top of the crop. There's a wholesale return to the original's smooth and refined voicing, with a significantly improved casing to boot. You're quickly drawn in by the all-new, aluminium construction and undoubtedly the best

looking remote for any product under £1,000. Other features include five line level inputs and a tape loop, but those seeking tone controls or headphone sockets will be disappointed. The standard inclusion of a MM/MC phono stage is extremely unusual these days, as is the substantial toroidal PSU, which helps generate the increased power output of 70 watts. Audio Analogue

wanted to get back to the sort of sound that made the original Puccini so beguiling and, on the evidence here, it has more than succeeded – they have produced one of the finest sounding amps' below £1,000 to *Hi-Fi World's* ears. It's no secret that we adore fluid, beguiling sounding amplification (be it valve or solid state), and while there are punchier and more powerful designs (such as Musical Fidelity's excellent X-150),

in the class, with fine separation and projection a further bonus. Vocals, in particular, are beautifully carried, just like a valve amplifier – and what's more remarkable is the complete lack of sibilance or, indeed, any harshness whatsoever. What is portrayed is true, and beautifully articulated. For those who tire quickly of music being thrown at you, then the Puccini's comforting presence is a welcome tonic – here's

“here's an amplifier that makes music sound good enough to bathe in”

we've not heard anything as 'human' as this. Balance is exactly right, with a bold, expansive sound; full of bounce, vitality and a level of refinement rare in an amplifier at this price. The wide soundstage doesn't quite the instrumental focus of a Naim Nait 5i, but it has far deeper bass, superior vocal texture and resolution of subtle detailing. Intimacy and textuality are without doubt better than anything

an amplifier that makes music sound good enough to bathe in! When it comes to crafting music, Audio Analogue's new Puccini Settanta is surely the finest in its class. Every note is carefully conveyed with no slop, no grain, no spit and most remarkably of all, no added gloss. As with the original it's a thoroughly convincing and totally engrossing piece of kit.

RUNNER UP: PRIMA LUNA PROLOGUE I INTEGRATED £800

Psst – want to know a secret? The vast majority of valve amplifiers are as bad as the breed's detractors assert – thanks to rubbish output transformers and amateur-hour build. But the Prima Luna is different – designed in Holland and built in China (to an unusually high standard), here's a genuinely capable and engaging tubular belle with performance way above rival tube (and transistor, for that matter) designs. It's imported by Absolute Sounds, although they're a little circumspect about admitting it in public (it doesn't have a telephone number price tag), but they needn't be – it's a diamond.



preamplifier



WRITER'S

**APRIL MUSIC
STELLO DP200 £1,495**

Thirty years ago, Japan's assault on the international hi-fi market began in earnest, and now it's the time of the South Koreans. April Music's Stello DP-200 represents the company's entry level preamplifier, but there's a twist - a 24/192 upsampling DAC built in. It's an unashamed, high end stereo device - with no multichannel pretensions whatsoever - that works as an analogue preamplifier, digital preamplifier and upsampling DAC. As such, it's a mightily handy bit of kit, but there's more - it also offers an optional MM/MC phono input card, an optional analogue to digital convertor card and a standard headphone preamplifier. It's a fully balanced discrete Class-A design, with high quality components inside, and very tidy it looks under the hood. Cable runs are neat, and it's been designed with short signal paths and a range of slot in card options.

The first analogue in can be configured for use with an optional MM/MC phono card (£195). Yet it's so much more than 'just' a high end preamp, thanks to its fully spec'd upsampling digital-to-analogue convertor which takes any digital input (32, 44.1, 48, 96 and 192kHz, 16 or 24bit) and crunches it to analogue at the maximum possible resolution, and also upsamples any or these resolutions to 48, 96 or 192kHz as selected by the Upsample button on

DP200 cannot be regarded as astringent in any way; rather it has a impressively open feel that's smooth right across the audio band. Vocals have a direct and natural quality, which give a fine sense of timbre and texture. Acoustic instruments have an innate naturalness to them that is rare at this price point. Treble is also excellent, with an upfront and explicit nature, yet things never descend into brightness. There's real atmosphere and space here. Allied to

"tremendously versatile, yet it suffers for this sonically not one jot..."

the fascia or remote. And then there's the optional (£145) analogue-to-digital convertor card, which inputs analogue (either line or from the aforementioned optional phono card, and outputs it digitally in 16 or 24bit, 48 or 96kHz resolutions. Finally, there's a rather good headphone amplifier built in, driving phones with 8-300Ω impedance! Sound is bright and sweet, the

an ever-so-slightly warm bass, the result is an open sound with the merest hint of euphony - the DP200 has a beautifully listenable and enjoyable sound. It's this machine's tremendous all-round sonic competence allied to a staggering versatility that makes it so compelling. Tremendously versatile, yet it suffers for this sonically not one jot.



RUNNER UP: MING DA MEIXING MC-7R £288

We're genuinely excited by the products that are now steadily winding their way out of China. The MC-7R really throws into stark relief some of the over-priced equipment we've been led to believe equates with 'high-end' here in England. This ridiculously good (at the price) tube preamp never once failed to impress, and was a pleasure to use. Genuine high-end sound on a budget - say no more!

power amplifier

**WINNER****MUSICAL FIDELITY X-P200**
£899

It's the eternal dilemma – you've got a decent integrated amplifier and you want more – more power, more control, more depth, more dimensionality. Yet it seems that you have to start spending serious money to really lift your system above its current good – but not brilliant – level of performance. Well, if you want serious high end

sound, lots of watts and an easy upgrade path – then you've just found it. Musical Fidelity's X-P200 is touted as 'a high performance power amp in a modest package' – and here's a rare example of the reality bearing out the hype. MF claims 2x120W RMS and this doubles when bridged to become a 250W RMS monobloc when bridged, with a claimed 75A peak-to-peak current

delivery. It's a simple enough thing to use – there's a power on button, and, interestingly, a choice of A or B inputs. Round the back, the rear panel has corresponding RCA phono inputs for A and B, plus a pair of line level phono outputs for bi-amping. There's a pair of loudspeaker binding posts per side; bridged mode operation is simply a matter of hooking one loudspeaker lead to the Right minus terminal, and the other

little of the mush, scunge and general gunk that afflicts oh-so-many transistor designs. It's open and transparent, and lets timbre and texture emerge from the loudspeakers in all its glory. It's not romantic though – don't go thinking this is some sepia-tinged retro special. There's visceral punch, with no shortage of current driving ability – and when you bridge them you realise it's a seriously big hitting

“this amp boasts serious high end sound, lots of watts and an easy upgrade path”

to the Left plus, on both X-P200s, of course. The X-P200 looks and feels a class act. Plugged into a decent preamplifier (such as MF Audio's Passive Preamp if it's a passive you want, or April Music's Stello DP200 if you want loads of features, or Musical Fidelity's own X-PRE if you want an excellent do-it-all design that's a beautiful visual match), you get a very clean sound with very

combo with vast, gut-churning tracts of bass. Real wallop, delivered with a velvet glove – every hi-fi home should have one, or two if at all possible... A truly affordable audiophile bargain, and one of the best things Musical Fidelity has made in a long time.

[shown in monobloc configuration with matching X-PRE v3 preamplifier]

RUNNER UP:

NAIM NAP200 £1,142

The company's cheapest 'Classic' power amplifier, it follows wisdom accrued from the genesis of Naim's flagship NAP500 amplifier. The result is a claimed 70W RMS per channel into 8 ohms, and the ability to drive a 2 ohm load for long periods of time. Although boasting a less impressive on-paper specification than many considerably less pricey rivals, in practice this is one of the gutsiest transistor amplifiers anywhere near the price. It's brilliantly fast, with firecracker dynamics, and makes almost anything else sound positively pedestrian. It's a more specialised bit of kit than the X-200, but none the worse for it. Naim separates have always been an acquired taste, but it's no surprise that lots of people acquire it...



loudspeakers

WINNER

SPENDOR S6E £1,495pr

If this loudspeaker was an automobile, it would be a Rover P5B – the bolide of choice for Prime ministers from Harold Wilson to Margaret Thatcher. It is terribly English – and all the better for it. It's technically interesting, conservatively yet stylishly presented and does the job unerringly and without protest. It works very well, with no small degree of panache. Loudspeakers are intensely subjective things, and not everyone will love the Spendor S6e, yet it's so damn good at so much that it's extremely hard to fault. Oh-so-many designs sound impressive in the showroom and yet when you get them

complement comprises a 180mm bass-mid drive unit and 27mm tweeter. These are the least 'showy' sounding loudspeakers we've heard that have been designed in the last two decades. Listened to cold, and with little attention paid to matching, placement or set-up, they're simply a tad over warm and lacklustre. Fettle them and the picture changes profoundly, with an extremely even-handed and open window on the music with none of the dry, acerbic, forward, distortion-fuelled zing of so many other rivals. Nor do they serve up bass boom that apparently adds weight but in truth kills speed – despite their innate warm-

“a civilised and sophisticated loudspeaker for people of a similar disposition”.

home it's downhill all the way – yet the reverse is true here. This floorstander seems a tad warm and woolly, yet when you position it carefully, match it sensibly and relax with your favourite disc, things change dramatically. It comes 'out of itself' and starts to sing like nothing else we've heard at or near its £1,495 retail price this year. It's conscientiously and thoroughly engineered (with lots of impressive detail touches), gracefully styled (by Allen Boothroyd - the man behind Meridian's arresting visual language) and sober yet immensely capable sounding. The cabinets don't attempt any fancy curvatures - rather, they're robustly put together, beautifully veneered and conventionally shaped affairs, housing a tweeter and mid/bass unit, and a clever downward firing port. The drive unit

side-of-neutral tonality, they never sound slow or ponderous. What they offer is a unique combination of speed, grip and transparency allied to most 'benevolent' tonality. To this day, we still get readers writing in extolling the virtues of Spendor's classic 1970s BC1s – their unremittingly 'liberal' sound winning many friends. Well, the S6es take these traditional values and put them into that legendary 'modern context' – they're not fat or loose like their progenitors, but have all their abiding charm. A civilised and sophisticated loudspeaker for people of a similar disposition.



RUNNER UP

ELAC FS207.2 £999.99

Most sub-£1,000 boxes offer you differing degrees of dryness, from 'southern Italy' to 'Sahara Desert'. The Elacs are different; they're lush, warm, musical and – their eternal credit – boast a sweet, airy and atmospheric treble. The reason for this is the company's home-made JET ribbon tweeter which is an absolute gem – it gives you a taste of the high end. These floorstanders take you places that other price rivals simply can't go, thanks to their superb drivers – think Honda VTECs to the wheezy diesel engines of their rivals... Wunderbar!.

headphones

WINNER:

SENNHEISER HD650 £299.99

Sennheiser's best ever dynamic headphone was launched this year. Millions of Euros spent in R&D has seen new technology developed for its £1,000 MKH40 broadcast microphone used to reduce distortion and deliver unprecedented clarity. They feel exquisite. At 260g they're quite substantial, but are superbly finished – the best we've ever encountered – with damped fibre frames, black stainless steel grilles and a high-quality titanium-silver finish. Inside, each side sports Sennheiser's patented Duofol transducers with two Mylar films per side to make one rigid diaphragm, with specially developed acoustic silk for precise, uniform damping. The coils themselves are ultra-light Aluminium (Copper Clad Alloy Wire), with Neodymium Iron magnets in a sophisticated magnet/diaphragm design for controlled long excursions with very low distortion. Three metres of connecting cable is used, which is detachable, made from highly conductive OFC copper for maximum signal transmission and Kevlar-reinforced for strength. Sennheiser says this gives very low handling noise (i.e. sensitivity to structure-borne sound. The result is that the capsules are made to the finest tolerances (within ± 1 dB), and used in hand-picked pairs. Sennheiser claims a frequency response of 16-30,000 Hz (± 1 dB), and quoted impedance is 300 ohms. They're about as comfortable as big hi-fi headphones can be. The elliptical design sits easily on the ears with the



soft padding excerpting 2.5N of contact pressure – not as slyph-like as Sennheiser's £29.95 PX-100s but not bad at all! Sonically, they actually sound quite soft at first, and seem to open up and get more expressive as the listening continues. Bass is slightly stronger and fuller than the HD600s, but emphatically more fluid and

lucid and ever so slightly sweeter. One weak point is the cables – substitute an aftermarket pair of Stefan AudioArt leads (costing nearly half as much as the headphones) and the performance rises to a new level – they're sweeter, more fluid and organic by far. Of course, no Sennheiser headphone will ever be

“a brilliantly judged do-it-all solution to the modern headphone problematic”

articulate. Midband is obviously smoother and more subtle, with better low level detailing and a greater sense of atmosphere and the treble is more atmospheric, 'spacey',

rich, creamy and euphonic - but the HD650s are a brilliantly judged do-it-all solution to the modern headphone problematic – and upgradeable too.

RUNNER UP:

ETYMOTIC ER-4P £240

If you've £25 to spend on a pair of in-ear headphones, Sennheiser's new MX-550s reign supreme, but for those who spend half their lives listening to music on the move – and there are many - then this is the very best way to do it. In fact, the Etymotics are better even than most loudspeakers – with electrostatic levels of clarity. A superb, ultra-focused design that more than justifies its stiff price.



accessory



TOWNSHEND MAXIMUM SUPERTWEETER £800pr

Townshend's Maximum supertweeter is a brilliant tweak – offering a dramatic audio upgrade to owners of both budget and high end loudspeaker systems alike. Not only does it open up the treble, as you'd expect, but brings real smoothness and air to the midband too. The Maximum comes in a very petite (50x30x100mm) casing in a choice of either Titanium or (in the case of the review samples) a stainless steel mirror finish which looks exquisite; in some way redolent of a 1950s broadcast microphone. Pressure relief vents in the sides of the case are provided to allow the air pressure on the ribbon to equalise in the event of sudden pressure changes. Inside is a super-powerful neodymium magnet and an ultra thin eight micron pure aluminium ribbon, plus a simple crossover to set the sensitivity. All

copper conductors, including the matching transformer windings and the aluminium ribbon, use Townshend Audio's Deep Cryogenically Treated (DCT) process, as found in its Isolda loudspeaker cables, and are heat annealed (-190C to +150C). Output may be set to suit loudspeakers with sensitivities from 80-110dB, adjusted in steps by a rear-mounted eight-position switch. Also on the back are the usual 4mm banana sockets. The kit comes complete with a set of

the ultra high frequency spectrum. Just as subwoofers seem to take the strain off loudspeaker bass units, making them altogether more fluid and unforced, so supertweeters seem to sweeten the treble. There's a small but obvious improvement in fluidity and ease in the high frequency region, which (interestingly) stretches down to the upper midband. The difference can be staggering (depending on your system), with a profound fillip to many loudspeakers'

“a brilliant tweak, offering a dramatic audio upgrade to any loudspeaker...”

very high quality 1.5m DCT cables, for wiring to the main speaker terminals via spade or piggy back connectors. Although human hearing rarely extends beyond 20kHz, we can 'perceive' (if not actually hear) higher – which is partly why the brickwall filtering of CD at 20kHz sounds so unnatural. To wit, the Maximums run from 20-70kHz (at -3dB points), or 12-90kHz (at -6dB), thus 'filling in'

treble performance and the addition of a subtle but oh-so-welcome atmosphere and 'spatiality' in both treble and upper midband regions. More impressive is the extra speed they bring; attack transients have better definition – yet there's absolutely no change in tonality. Great performance, engineering and build make them this year's essential high end audio accessory.



RUNNER UP: MUSICAL FIDELITY X-CANS v3 £299

Although many consider headphones an irrelevance, for others they're a lifeline. Many audiophiles can't turn up the volume for fear of annoying their neighbours, while others crave a shortcut to high end loudspeaker sound at a fraction of the price. As such, the X-CANS v3 is an essential purchase – it gives genuinely high fidelity sound and permits the use of any headphone you could ever imagine. It's neat, looks cool and gets better the more you use it – some are even tweaking theirs and changing tubes. Partner this with a pair of Sennheiser HD650s with Stefan AudioArt cables and you'll struggle to find a high end loudspeaker that comes close!

mail

Visit our website at www.hi-fiworld.co.uk or send your emails to letters@hi-fiworld.co.uk. Letter of the month wins a pair of Precious Metals Interconnects and one year FREE subscription to HI-FI World.



Letter of the Month

THE RIGHTS STUFF

At present it is totally illegal to copy any data from one medium to another without a license. Naturally this includes anyone using an iPod, or recording vinyl for backup purposes, or creating CD-Rs for use in the car. It also impacts on anyone backing up computer software from the Hard Drive to archival media such as CD or DVD, and will have a major impact on HDD music systems. The Patent Office website says this on the subject of copying:

Q - Do I always need permission to copy or use copyright material?

A - No, there are certain exceptions to the rights given to the copyright owner. For example, limited use of works may be possible for non-commercial research and private study, criticism or review, reporting current events, judicial proceedings and teaching in schools. But if you are copying large amounts of material and/or making multiple copies then you may still need permission. Also, it is generally necessary to include an acknowledgement of the name of the copyright work and its author.

Q - But if I've bought something, can't I use it however I like?

A - Just buying a copy of a book, CD, video, computer program, etc. does not necessarily give you the right to make further copies (even for private use) or play or show them in public. The right to do these things will generally remain with the copyright owner, whose permission you would need. You should note that photocopying a work, scanning a work to produce an electronic copy and downloading a copy of a work which is in an electronic form (e.g. on a CD-ROM or online database) all involve copying the work, so that permission to copy is generally needed.

Q - But if I have permission, i.e. a license, to use a work, can't I use it however I like?

A - Not unless the license you have allows any use of the work. Often a

copyright owner will only give permission for some uses of a work, e.g. publication of a photograph in a particular newspaper, and, if you want to use the work in any other way, e.g. by publishing the photograph in a magazine, you will need to seek further permission.

This is a ridiculous state of affairs and the current law is under review. If you think you should be allowed to copy your music to other media for storage or use elsewhere in your environment you should write to Teresa Arnesen of the Intellectual Property & Innovation Directorate at the UK Patent Office at copyright@patent.gov.uk about consultation on working paper SEC (2004) 995 (19/7/04) reviewing EU legislation in the field of copyright and related rights. You should also write to Markt-E4@cec.eu.int at the European Commission. You can learn more about the consultation at http://europa.eu.int/commlinternal_market/copyright/review/consultation_en.htm, and a link to the Europa website etc can be found on the page of the Patent Office at <http://www.patent.gov.uk/copy/notices/2004/consultation.htm>. They are interested to hear individual's views on the subject, rather than just the big corporations.

Tom Alves

I had a long telephone conversation just the other day on this subject with the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry (IFPI), who represent artists worldwide. Technically, under UK law, you cannot copy without a license. However, when you download legally, a license has been granted to allow copying. So copying to an iPod is legal. What you can and can't do with what is, in effect, someone else's property is decided by them and you, in a contract. The law only applies when a contract is not negotiated, for whatever reason.

Apple offer music for sale with pre-negotiated FairPlay rights, an excellent solution, but sadly

Microsoft have allowed the Rights to be set on an ad-hoc basis by the Rights Holders which results in the sort of mess you see on OD2 sites. It raises the need for buyers to read lengthy statements of Rights before purchasing, and if they don't then it's considered their fault if those Rights prove unacceptable after download. This can mean anything, say 99p for just one play! The IFPI were defensive about this when I questioned them and quite obviously have no intention of attempting to establish a consistent set of usage Rights from their members, even though Apple's solution has proven enormously popular.

In the background, with Copyright Law varying across EU states, the European Union is trying to get to grips with this issue yet again. The last I heard, they were discussing a total EU wide ban on copying devices! This accords with UK law, but not with law in most other EU states, where limited copying is allowed. For the time being, whilst the EU debates this matter, no one is bothering to do much, it appears. It isn't a very satisfactory situation but I would doubt (and hope) no one will be prosecuted in the UK for copying for personal use whilst such a totally confusing situation exists. **NK**



when copying music legal and when is it not? Right now, the law isn't clear...

BIG IN JAPAN

Dear David,
Thanks you for your great 'Digital Surround' special issue. Particularly, I had a great impression about your review of the Marantz CD 63 KI DP. I agree strongly with you and Mr. Ken Ishiwata's opinions about early Philips and Marantz CD spinners. I still use a CD 94 limited and Mr. Kinoshita, a very famous audio guru, founder of Ray Audio and co-designer of the original TAD units, uses a Marantz CD99 as his reference. My friend, one of the most famous audio critics, Mr. Ichiroh Igarashi, surprisingly still uses the first generation Pro CD spinner, the Philips LHH 2000! (Mr. Kinoshita built his very beautiful and state of the art studio at Hakone, Japan national park. He prefers analogue audio strongly like you, and several months ago he bought 1,300 mint 78s!)

By the way, I think Compact Discs made in the 1980s sound better than modern pressed CD. Particularly, the CDs manufactured by PDO (Polygram Dupont Optical) sound far better than any modern disc. For example, in the 1980s Decca made many recordings of Solti Chicago and Dohnanyi Cleveland. I have a lot of them made by PDO. They sound great - full bodied, sweet and musical. Now we can buy same titles in various reissue versions, but they sound thin, harsh and not musical. Why? I think two reasons - a respected mastering engineer Doug Sax said, "digital does not get better going through a computer", and now CDs are mastered via computers. In the 1980s, CDs weren't, but via the Sony 1630 or 1610 format instead. Also, in the 1980s PDO CDs was made by a system of 'stampers', just like analogue LPs. Now all CDs are manufactured by a system of 'injection'. What do you think about my opinion?

Ken Tanaka
Tokyo

P.S. Mr Ken Ishiwata is one of the very famous audio celebrities, and of course he is Japanese - but we can't buy any KI products in Japan?

Hi Ken - glad you liked the KI DP piece - it certainly put the cat among the pigeons. I've had countless emails accusing me (and KI) of being frauds, charlatans, self-aggrandisers, etc. (repeat to fade), and countless more telling me how right KI was in what he said - namely that 'it ain't what you do, it's the way that you do it'... I think that CD technology is changing, and it's not always for the better - simple as that. Swing arm CD transports and

multibit DACs (to name but two) simply aren't here anymore, yet to many ears sound dramatically more musical. Still, this is no council of despair - because there are great players out there even now, it's just that fewer and fewer manufacturers can be bothered to make them. Hats off to Exposure, which is actually manufacturing (albeit in small volumes) a genuine, bespoke CD transport working in ye olde real time (not 52x, CD-ROM style) and most emphatically not with a pick up designed to read the latest Bridget

most interested. Oh well, I better stop yakking on about classic 16bit digital, lest I confuse a small but vociferous minority of Hi-Fi World readers who dwell under the misapprehension that I'm only interested in LPs for the absence of the 'cult of Ken Ishiwata' in his native Japan, well maybe it's because he's lived in Antwerp, Belgium for the past fifteen years and is now buying a penthouse near Shenzhen, China - and so doesn't spend much time in his lovely home country any more? **DP**



early multibit Marantz CD73 - "they don't make 'em like that anymore", etc...

Jones movie on DVD. We're already seeing a renewed interest in classic 16bit, and I wonder how long it's going to take before we get retro players made new? Hmm... maybe we shouldn't hold our breath, as it's much easier to bung in a DVD mech, add a toroidal transformer and charge a silly sum... Anyway, somewhat circuitously, Exposure's Andy Whittle paid me a visit last week, and was most interested to hear the aforementioned Marantz CD63 KI DP through my system. He smiled and said, "I know Ken, he's a clever b*****d - and that just doesn't sound like CD!" How's that for a ringing endorsement?

As for CD pressings, now that's an interesting point. When I lived in Japan, I was constantly amazed by the amount of audiophile CD pressings on sale - not just from hi-fi shops but from common-or-garden 'CD shops' too. The Japanese take this subject far more seriously than we do, and I have to say we've had our eye off the ball even more as we've watched DVD-A and SACD sales soar to, errm, half that of LP, here in the UK. Maybe we should be more aware of the differences between the software - it's all too easy to obsess on the hardware from where I'm sitting. If any readers have particular observations, I'd be

ONE LOVE

I am happy with my stereo system to play LPs. The source consists of a Michell Orbe, Origin Live Encounter arm and Grado Statement cartridge. However, mono records sound thin on this system. Therefore I plan to have a second system with a good mono cartridge. Lyra seems a very good cartridge which seems to be alone at the top. I have the idea that a unipivot arm will work relatively well with a mono cartridge. Do you have experience with this cartridge in a unipivot arm, do you know other top of the line mono cartridge?
Lawrence Ouweltjes
Holland

Hello Lawrence. Over the years I have amassed a collection of records which date from the 1920s to the present day. The pickup arm to use for older recordings is the Hadcock GH242. It is a unipivot and the top tube is easily removable, so aiding us mono freaks. This is essential as early recordings had a much wider groove and a change of cartridge is very useful. I regularly use a Music Maker 3 and I know that Len Gregory does make them for 78rpm use. This means that the stylus is a conical type, not the usual elliptical profile found on most modern pick up cartridges. I don't think anyone

makes a dedicated mono cartridge any more, but I have had really good results with my Music Maker. Another point to bear in mind is equalisation system, as over the years it has changed numerous times. Graham Slee makes an adjustable stage - I use one with all of my records! This product is a very fine unit, well built, in an elegant case, and it won't break the bank. A website to investigate for further detailed information is the Wolverine Antique Music Society - find it on www.Google.com. Good luck in your quest.

SW



— Mitchell Orbe sounds thin with mono LPs – whatever next?

SACD, HYPE AND DVD-A

It was interesting to read Patrick Cleasby's comments on DualDisc (November) but it would be even more interesting to know where all those unattributed negative comments came from. Who is "the manager of a band with a real interest in bringing surround titles to market" for example? Not someone who is clued up about DVD-Audio, I would suspect, but more likely someone who has become convinced by the hype of SACD. Pink Floyd, perhaps? James Guthrie's technically erroneous comments at the "Dark Side of the Moon" SACD launch are now notorious in the professional audio industry as examples of hype triumphing over reality, on a par with arm-bending 'tests' in consumer audio, but unfortunately some people who evidently don't trust their ears believed it. Meanwhile, it is difficult to find "plenty others out there of a similar mind" who have not accepted the SACD shilling. It's also difficult to find verifiable quotes of companies pooh-poohing DualDisc - sure, it may be too expensive for some smaller companies initially, and plenty of content providers are waiting to see how the launch goes - but record companies holding their breath on the one hand, and going on record as rejecting the format on the other, are two very different things. You can find several of one, but very few of the other.

Meanwhile, what are the facts

about DualDisc? The test market went extremely well, and while apparently 12% of purchasers had issues with the disc or its packaging, to conclude that this was a result of disc compatibility problems would be erroneous, as the figure included problems with the prototype case (disc clamp and case lid clip being too loose in particular) - which many suffered from. One report, from an unnamed laboratory quoted in a US magazine, claimed to have found technical issues with disc compatibility - but the magazine refused to reveal the name of the lab concerned for some reason, perhaps to do with their

affiliation, and the results could not be verified. In fact there appear to have been no significant issues with disc compatibility in slot-loaders, where there was the greatest pre-test worry on this score.

And *of course* Philips, the number two backer of SACD, will not approve the CD side of a DualDisc! What else do you expect? They do not approve the millions of copy-protected CDs out there either, and rightly so, but the fact is that the CD side of the discs play fine, so whether or not Philips deign to put the CD brand on DualDisc or not matters not (the DVD side, of course, has been approved by the DVD Forum, who one might argue have the opposite axe to grind). For similar reasons, of course Sony DualDiscs will not have DVD-A content - for now - widespread industry rumours suggesting that Sony Music really want to get on the bandwagon with everyone else but are forbidden to do so.

Even the current alleged limitations on disc capacity could be of little import, even allowing for the fact that many titles use nothing like the full capacity anyway. Remember when CDs came out originally? They too were limited to around an hour playing time - and in fact that was the original claim for the format, just as today it is the claim for the CD side of a DualDisc. What makes us so certain that the prototype form of an innovation defines its characteristics

forever? It hasn't been like that with any other consumer medium, why should it be the case here? The very existence of a dual-sided CD/DVD was declared impossible just a short while ago.

Of course there are very real issues with DualDisc. One is the apparent conflict of patents between DualDisc and DVD-Plus. This is not an issue in the States, but it is in Europe, and it needs to be resolved or both parties will lose and only lawyers will win (wasn't it always thus?). In fact there are some good points about DVD-Plus - including thickness and refractive index - that not only should be considered in coming to a unified agreement, but also make the two forms different enough to consider them, in my view, as different products. Quite frankly, either will do.

Another issue, pointed out by Cleasby, is whether or not the majority of the population actually want a high-resolution audio format at all - perhaps "DVD Music" will do, with lossy-compressed audio. That's certainly a reasonable question, but I believe that ultimately people will accept the idea of high-resolution, lossless, multichannel audio. DVD-Audio already offers compatibility with DVD-Video players and while it's true that some manufacturers are pulling back from the "universal" player - it is actually difficult to build a player that handles SACD and DVD-based formats equally well - it is extremely easy for a DVD-Video player design to be extended to include DVD-Audio, which is one reason a growing number do. And of course, the Compact Disc is by no means dead yet: it will likely be around for some time, with in-car players set to be particularly long-lasting. As a result, there is plenty of room for a transitional strategy, whether it's packages with a DVD-Audio/Video disc and a CD - or it comes in the shape of a DualDisc, compatible with virtually anything.

Richard Elen
Head of Creative Services,
Meridian Audio Ltd.

Thanks for your insight into the world of SACD, hype and DVD-Audio. It underlines how divided the industry has become over many issues, and how much jockeying is going on with proprietary technologies. DualDisc does indeed look interesting, as it will allow DVD-Audio discs to be racked with CD and therefore find a space in record stores, a crucial advantage SACD currently enjoys. On the matter of SACD versus DVD-A, perhaps I can explain to readers that Direct Stream Digital (DSD) used on SACD throws up fierce levels of noise above 20kHz, around -40dB, which is a real

worry to most audio engineers. However, SACD does sound good in my view, in spite of this. But one engineer I know insists this is due to the presence of noise, because our perceptions are modified by noise. It's an open issue. Funny you should use the word "transitional" because that's just what Blu-Ray founders cheekily label HD-DVD. Can't help feeling it will be the buzzword of 2005. I have yet to see DSD pop up in the Blu-Ray audio spec, so perhaps Sony don't intend to push SACD much further in any case. In which case PCM club members at Meridian can climb into bed at night with a smile on their face! **NK**

PIVOTAL CHOICE

I own a Thorens TD124 and a Garrard 301. The TD124 came with an Ortofon RS-212 which is not bad, but quite difficult to set up. Last week I fitted a SME 3009 II to the TD124. Although it is stunning to look at, the sound is quite disappointing. I am thinking of selling both arms (I gather that the RS-212 is quite sought after) and buying two modern arms to use with the turntables. I am thinking of Roksan Nima and Hadcock unipivots. I would like your opinion on this and also if there are any other arms that you think will suit these turntables.
regards,
Chris from Brisbane, Oz

Hi Chris. You have two of the finest turntables in the world. I have used both of these turntables and have also mounted modern pick up arms and cartridges to both of them. Both of these turntables benefit from a fine pick up arm. I also think that the Ortofon RS-212 pick up arm is best sold on, as spares are difficult, if not impossible to obtain. But what do you replace the old pick up arms with? Your choices of either the Hadcock GH242 or the Roksan Nima is very well thought out. Whilst the Nima is a fine pick up arm and a class leader, the Hadcock is better in my view. Both of these arms use the unipivot principle and consequently have almost negligible bearing friction. The Hadcock is the obvious choice not only because it describes a much larger stereo image with stronger bass delivery, but also the top arm tube is easily removed. Both of these arms will outperform the SME IV and the SME V, in my humble opinion. Another advantage of using the Hadcock is that as you are using two turntables you can change cartridges very quickly and easily by interchanging

the arm wands. This is not possible with the Roksan Nima. I have used Hadcock arms with a variety of turntables and have always had extremely fine reproduction. I hope this answers your question.
SW

Oh boy – don't say things like 'the Hadcock easily outperforms the SME Series V', Stewart – I don't think our mail server will be able to take the strain! The backlash starts here...
DP

Denon DL-160 high output moving coil.

About the Shure, Noel Keywood says, "the M97xE looks like an old design". Though now manufactured in Mexico, the M97 body looks the same as the previous USA manufactured M97HE, which NK may remember having reviewed for "Hi-Fi News" - published in their August 1980 issue - 24 years ago! I used an M97HE and with its stabiliser down I could hear the stabiliser's bristles reproducing the start of every track before the stylus arrived there. This was probably induced via



Thorens TD124 – one of SW's many 'best turntables in the world'...

TIP TIPS

The phono cartridge group test - "Multi Tracking" - by Stewart Wennen in the September '04 issue was very interesting. Thank you for publishing it, but there is one error. On page 21 Mr Wennen states about the Goldring 1006's ability to accept a better stylus that "it's the only one in the group to offer such upgradeability". This is not correct. The Ortofon 500 series body will also accept other available Ortofon styli. Of those, the 520MkII with its naked elliptical stylus would have been fairer to Ortofon to have included in the group test, as it is of similar specification and price to two of the others tested, rather than the cheaper 510MkII with its higher mass, rondel-mounted black diamond. The next Ortofon stylus upgrade is to the 530MkII which, with its Fine Line stylus, would be the one to compare to the Audio-Technica AT440ML as it has the same stylus profile, and the Shure and Stanton styli are said to have similar profiles. If Hi-Fi World is not able to obtain those Ortofons, then the lower body mass Ortofon Super OM20 and Super OM30 have the same two stylus profiles. An interesting follow-up group test would be to compare either or both the Ortofons with the current specification Goldring 1012GX and some others at that price which Hi-Fi World has not reviewed, such as the

body resonances and was at very low relative volume level but still too audible. Not only was the music less resonance muddied with the stabilizer clipped up away, but the stylus then also tracked better with Classical music on loud piano transients; female vocals, etc...

Chris Taylor

Yes, the Ortofon 500 series body will take a better stylus and can be upgraded in this manner. Thanks for the observation Chris. The M97 seemed familiar; now I know why! Is it really twenty four years ago that we were dragging rocks along grooves? Still, humans have been doing amazing things with rocks for along time - just look at Stonehenge. The 'new' M97xE was nice enough all the same, if not in the same league as the V15 VxMR, which I admire. Pre-echo was a problem with close cut LPs, being caused by the modulation cut into a groove affecting those adjacent to it, audible when they were silent. I suspect this is what you were hearing. All the same, many people decided Shure's brush subtly degraded sound quality and stopped using it. I hope we can revisit budget cartridges soon and take another look at the many good modern designs that keep LP sounding good even after twenty four years. **NK**

UNDER-EXPOSED

I have been a reader of *Hi-Fi World* for most of the time it has been on the news stands, but have never previously written in or otherwise contributed to the magazine. Like many, I suspect, I've learnt and upgraded over time, using the hints, tips and recommendations you and your colleagues have suggested.

My present route to musical nirvana is unconventional, but damned effective! As with both Mr Walker and DP, I am another LS3/5a-to-NS1000M upgrader: I put this down to the clarity of the mid band and lack of audible distortion both 'speakers possess (well, within their limits, in the case of the 3/5). A recurring theme with several recent correspondents has been that of which amplifier would match well with the big Yams. As I'm in the fortunate position of having access to all manner of stuff, I'll give you some suggestions...

- [1] Exposure 4 – tried and loved the 7 and 8 combo I picked up from your classifieds, but found I needed extra grunt. As most of the older Exposure amps are variations on a theme, a 'bigger 8' seemed to fit the bill – did it! Mine is a Single, not one of the newer Dual Regulated models: I bet a DR would sound sublime...
- [2] Sugden Masterclass Power – again, I was used to a smaller Sugden Class A design: again, nice sounds, but more welly needed. Only my parlous finances at the time stopped me buying it.
- [3] McIntosh MC2105 Power – I used this one for three or four years, was always impressed by the scale and power, but found it was less involving than the above-mentioned.
- [4] restored Leak Stereo 20 – unfortunately, this was only ever loaned to me: it returned to me after conversion to triode operation (yes, he most certainly does know what he's doing!) but the magic had gone, for me at least...
- [5] Yamaha B2 – until the V-FETs died!

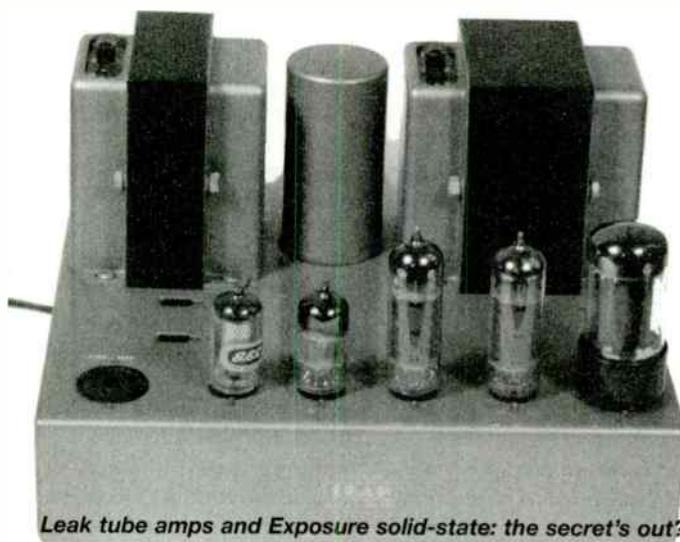
Apart from the Leak, fairly typical recommendations, I'd guess, but immediately before the Exposures came on the scene, I'd been using a real odd ball: it was a Philips "Hi Fi" Stereo valve amp, model no AG9015, input by DIN socket... dear oh dear, no chance... what the heck! Once again, only a lack of power let it down. Same story with a "DIN-tastic" 'seventies Sugden A21... a Final Edition Musical Fidelity A1 was another one... hell, I was even brave/stupid enough to use an MF B1 with the '1000s, briefly!

Then there's the stuff I've borrowed from work - the Luxmans I'd been using as surround amps (stereo and monos), a Quad 520: basically, despite numerous attempts I've found nothing I'd rather

use. On this basis, I really think you ought to put the Exposure IV (as it says on the fascia) into your "World Classics" listing. Not sure quite when Exposure stopped production, but my 1981 "Hi Fi Yearbook" includes an early version, whilst I borrowed John (Mr Exposure, pre-takeover) Farlowe's demonstrator for the shop I was working at in 1998. Not sure when the DR model was introduced, but that's what I was loaned back then.

Maybe there weren't that many built (I couldn't say) but the value for money factor is high. Mine (with a IX PSU and XI pre) cost me £675 – the 1981 price for the III pre and IV in combination was £575). I do recall the IVDR costing approx £4k in '98, which tallies nicely with your estimates of what new NS1000s would cost today (NS1000s were £817 in 1981). With your oft-quoted "sweeter/ warmer/ more beguiling/ smoother than Naim" descriptions of these older Exposures, I'm amazed you don't suggest them as frequently as you do certain Salisbury-built amplifiers. I should tell you that I

company has been through some changes of late, and – as before – is not very 'out there' with media presence, advertising, PR work, etc., so as a magazine editor it's all too easy to overlook the brand. But I have a great respect for them, right from when I started using an original X integrated in my eighties-tastic Linn LP12/ Kan I system in 1987. Loved your letter – some very apposite comments which apply to driving any big, capable speaker and not just the NS1000Ms. I'd have loved to have heard the Yamaha B2 in action – I had the Sony rival TAN-7B V-FET power amp, and it was gorgeous until it went up in smoke, like Cheech and Chong and – yes, you've guessed it – no spares available. So methinks *Hi-Fi World* should start a campaign for the electronics giants to 'Save Our Semiconductors'. If Raleigh can bring back the Chopper bike, then it's surely only a matter of time before the OE market is flooded with millions of cheap Vertical Field Effect Transistors again? DP



have not had any professional links with Exposure since they were taken over, although I do occasionally visit their website and their Forum. Exposure has always been one of hi-fi's more esoteric brands: will HFW be running more reviews of their products in the near future? I'd dearly love to hear how you guys get on with the XXII CD player, for example. Ah well, back to the Troughline... such lovely tone, don'tcha know!

Rob Coe

Yes – we will be running more Exposure stuff – hopefully a lot more, both old and new, as they're very 'tube-like' transistor amplifiers. If anyone has a classic eighties Exposure 7/8 combo, then we'd love to review it, so do let us know! This

TAXING MY SANITY...

I have recently bought hi-fi from abroad and can add to the correspondence in your October issue about the difficulty of assessing import duty. Goods brought into the European Union worth less than £18 are free of duty - so resist the temptation to buy a bundle of CDs or DVDs from the USA to save on carriage and instead buy them singly. For all other goods, a commodity code is used. For domestic consumer electronics the code is 8518409900. This tells the revenue to charge 4.5% Import Duty on the cost of the goods, VAT at 17.5% is charged on top (a tax on a tax), and the carrier then adds a handling charge. These fees are payable on delivery of the item.

However, this system is very hit and miss in my experience. For the last three

items that my friends and I have purchased, not once was duty applied correctly. In one case it was under calculated by several hundred pounds, in another no duty was charged at all, and in the third (my case!) I was overcharged about four times too much. As a two to one gamble for purchasers it seems worth it but it doesn't inspire me with confidence in the efficiency of our Customs and Excise service.

In general, equipment from the USA and the Far East can be worth buying as you can often purchase stuff that is not available in this country. For example I have just purchased a pair of "Gizmos" promoted on the Lowther USA web site but not available here, that make my Acoustas sound amazing. However, it is probably not worth doing just for the price advantage alone. Even with the current exchange rates, the price in dollars will usually translate to the equivalent number of pounds, once transport costs and import taxes are taken into account. And there are still the issues of different mains voltages in different countries, absence of consumer protection and the hassle factor to consider.

Clive Richards

BREAKTHROUGH

Having recently acquired a new Michell Gyro SE1 Michell Tecnoarm al Ortofon MC25FL turntable/arm/cartridge, enjoyment of my new purchase is currently being severely limited by electrical breakthrough from the speakers when the turntable is in use. This occurs when my admittedly ancient fridge/freezer is starting and stopping. Its motor is definitely suspect as it audibly "clunks" on start up. However similar "crackles and pops" emit from the speakers when a fluorescent strip light in the kitchen is turned on and off.

In an effort to address this, I fitted an anti-surge adapter to both the turntable and fridge freezer and also tried fitting ferrite rings around the Michell's phono leads - both to no avail. No problems occur when ordinary tungsten lamps or other electrical devices e.g. hairdryers/ kettles etc are turned on and off. An additional problem occurs just prior to nightfall when RF/shortwave breakthrough is being experienced at medium listening levels. This disappears when the earth lead from the Gyro is disconnected from the amp - however it is then replaced by an audible hum. None of the problems outlined were experienced with my previous analogue combination of Rega P3/RB300/K9 and significantly there is no audible disturbance when

other sources are selected e.g. CD, tuner.

Any thoughts on a solution? A fellow enthusiast has suggested it is all down to the additional sensitivity of the Ortofon MC cartridge as opposed to the MM Linn. I am quite happy to replace the fridge-freezer if this addresses the main issue however clearly this is not necessarily the root of the problem. Until a solution is found the turntable is virtually redundant as in use the resultant crackles and pops from the speakers when the fridge/freezer is operating is loud enough to potentially fry the tweeters on my TDL RTL 4s notwithstanding other potential damage.

The rest of my system comprises: Musical Fidelity 3.2 integrated amp., Musical Fidelity 3.2 CD player, Denon TU 260L tuner, Isotek Minisub G1 I, Isotek Super Elite Power cords, TDL RTL 4 loudspeakers / QED bi wire Silver Anniversary cable Stand Unique 6mm glass shelved tower. Finally, assuming I can resolve the current problems any thoughts on my next upgrade - my dealer is arranging for a loan of an Audiophile Base for the Gyro. I am also considering the HR power supply (would this help with my main problem??) and a separate phono stage.

Barrie Wilson
Glasgow

Your problem seems to be RF interference, picked up by the cartridge's signal leads. The screening can around a cartridge's signal coils goes to ground through the Green earth return (RG or Right Ground). Check that this earth return is working properly, ensuring all connections are clean and secure. With a source impedance of around 3ohms and a minimum load

impedance of 100ohms (even 47ohms will do) a 0.1uF capacitor from each signal line to ground should short the RF to ground without affecting cartridge output up to 20kHz. Ideally, a capacitor like this should be connected within the amplifier, often across the base/emitter junction of the first input transistor, or the input pins of the first IC. You should ensure the pickup arm tube is earthed and you may even re-position or arrange the connecting cables to work less effectively as an aerial. Sometimes RF pickup can be a pig to cure though and I suspect use of an RF protected or low input impedance MC phono stage will banish your problem. Our suggestion is to borrow an external phono stage and see what difference it makes. **NK**

Hi Barrie - I'd say an Audiophile Furniture Base SP01 support would be an excellent solution - indeed I use two under my Orbe, with profound results. The HR PSU brings a lot of extra focus to the Gyro, and this is a deck that's already pretty sharp - so another case of thumbs aloft for this. As you've got an all Michell front end, I'd recommend the Trichord Dino. I know it's not flavour of the month; SW is raving about the Graham Slee Era V (which is excellent), but there's no denying the fine value and synergy the Dino brings. When you've got more moolah, I'd go straight for the Whest Audio MSU20/PS20, but this is simply overkill considering your existing ancillaries and cartridge. When you've got your Dino and HR, I'd aim for an Ortofon Kontrapunkt B, and then a speaker upgrade - write in again when the time is nigh. **DP**



Trichord Dino - an excellent companion to any Michell front end, despite the competition hotting up of late...]

DUAL REPLY

I would imagine there have probably been plenty of replies to help John Guest out with his Dual CS5000, but just in case there hasn't my recommendation would be for him to get in touch with Robert Tracy at All in One Electronics. His email is - rtracy@all-electronics.com and the company's website is www.all-electronics.com. He was very helpful with spares for my own CS5000 and they're even located on the right side of the Atlantic for John, in Canada.

Adam Smith
Acoustic Engineer
Mordaunt Short
London

IN THE AIR TONIGHT...

Patrick Cleasby's Airtunes article was interesting, and Patrick is clearly an Apple fan, but his article seems to imply that Apple is the only company with such a solution. How about the Netgear Wireless Digital Music Player? Click on <http://www.netgear.com/products/details/MPI01.ph> for details. This device addresses the failings of the Apple offering i.e. no remote and no easy way of controlling the server from the listening room. These are fairly fundamental issues! Patrick's work around using a Bluetooth adaptor and a mobile phone is hardly an elegant solution.... I think Hi-Fi World ought to acknowledge that there are alternatives.

Graeme Miller

But seriously, Graeme, I do thank you for this – Patrick's something of an Apple aficionado. If he gets started on G5s, iPods, etc., people can frequently be seen running screaming in the opposite direction, jumping off tall buildings, etc. I know we indulge him too much. It's nice to be balanced, isn't it – I for one know I am totally neutral about everything with no known vices. DP

NAD FOR IT

I read Dominic Todd's review of the NAD C352 with great interest as I'm the very happy owner of C320BEE and I think his review is pretty much spot on. Bravo Hi-Fi World a balanced review that keeps everything in perspective and no gushing unsustainable hype!

The current crop of NAD integrated amplifiers are all very solid performers with no major deficiencies given the price. They are not giant killers but do surprise with a grain-free and open sound. I came to my amplifier via DIY valves so it may seem positively strange that I might be happy listening to a low price amp, but firstly my amp is not

stock, and more importantly I must say in the ten or so years I've been out of the hi-fi mainstream there has certainly been a very noticeable improvement in the breed en masse. Ten years ago I despaired about the state of hi-fi where the ever-abundant hype was not being backed up with good sound. So while I used to be very anti solid state I now think done right it's just as valid as valves. I'm not saying they sound same (that would be madness) but that good solid state has its own take on music that I (and I never thought I'd say this) can and do enjoy.

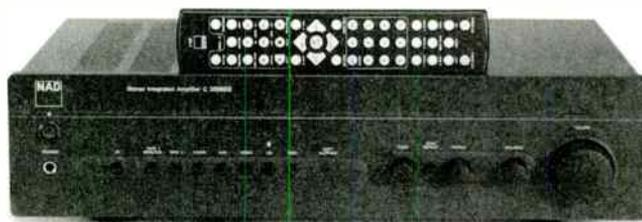
Anyway, the main reason I'm writing is to pass on a couple of easy tweaks that lift all NAD integrated amps into the next level of audiophile components. This first is the PRE OUT/POWER IN jumpers on the back of the amp. As Dominic pointed out the NAD philosophy of spending the money on the inside of the amp may be a commendable design philosophy but it does have some drawbacks (aesthetic ones for a start) but the jumpers are total audio poison. From what I can tell the jumpers are nickel-plated steel and they are in signal path! Replacing them with even an average pair of interconnects bring about a noticeable improvement. A pair of made to measure jumpers using Bullet Plugs is much better. If you do this tweak expect the sound to be cleaner and more detailed.

Second tweak is to put the amp on

and open. There are many other tweaks but they all entail taking the unit apart I can write about them if you like but I thought I'd pass on these simple tweaks that can be done by all owners of NAD integrated amps. I'm sure if you did a new review of the unit with the above tweaks the amp would shine even brighter.

Anthony Dockrill

Thanks Anthony. My first serious hi-fi amplifier was a NAD 3120 (3020 without tone controls), and over many years I found the points you make now to be spot on. The PRE OUT/ POWER IN jumpers are clearly a cost saver – cleaning them with Kontak helps a bit, but the best tweak is to replace them altogether. I did my mod in the eighties, so it was 10cm lengths of DNM solid core (what else!) with cheapo Maplin phonos – result: kerpow! Things tightens up no end and fell into better focus. Second, Foculpods are brilliant – I don't know for the life of me why everyone doesn't use them on everything – the level of improvement they make for such a modest outlay is frankly silly. Likewise, the SOFT CLIPPING is great for student parties, but not for anything else. I love NAD amps; they're great things that are easily tweaked – and they don't even look plug-ugly any more – what's the world coming to? DP



our NAD C320BEE review: shock horror – someone agrees with Dominic Todd at long last!

Foculpods and place some weight on the amp (I use a tuner also sitting on Foculpods so there is a decent gap for air circulation - must let the amp breathe!). This simple but essential tweak brings a very noticeable improvement in detail and sound staging - its sounds much less confused to high volume levels and the bass is less warm and carries much more weight. The lowly origins of the amp I think is shown up very clearly by its sensitivity to vibration but the fundamentally good design does shine through if given a chance.

Oh and do turn off the Soft Clipping (unless you are having a party) it makes the amp sound less natural

THE TUBE

I'm addressing this to the venerable Mr. Keyword as he is the particular reviewer who has hands on with the speakers that I own, namely the Arum Cantus Leisure 2. Having read your review in the October World I don't think anyone could have got the measure of these speakers any better. I purchased my speakers some months back directly from China, before there was (I think) a UK distributor, so consequently paid a lot less, but that is beside the point. I have also acquired a pair of single-ended monoblocs that use the large Russian transmitting triode tube, the GM70. It is similar to the 845, which is

somewhat of a rare beast and might fulfil Noel's wishes from a previous magazine article that I remember him saying that what the world wants is a new thermionic device.

These amps are rated at 30 watts/channel but do not drive the low sensitivity Arums the way my solid state amps do, which consequently sees me winding the volume control up to the twelve o'clock position. I would like to purchase a second pair of speakers with a high sensitivity and easy load so that my GM70 amps do not have to work so hard, BUT as I have spent my budget (and more) on these amps I am left with looking for something as a temporary measure (read cheap) until funds allow.

So what would you recommend that I audition? I would assume it would be a floor standing speaker as these are usually more efficient than monitor types. I have been looking at the specifications and reviews of a number of speakers and the Acoustic Energy Evo 3 looks a likely contender but there are many more out there that look suitable on paper so your informed advice would be most appreciated.

An Avid Subscriber

John Clark

Wow! Don't put your finger inside to check it's working! The GM70 tube is a rare device from the Ulyanov factory, Ulyanovsk, Russia. With a quoted anode voltage of 1.65kV it is, like all big power triodes, a fairly frightening device that stands around 18cm tall and will fry anything that comes close. It certainly is the sort of amplifying device I was thinking about, and Svetlana's version illustrates why. Their monster SV572-10 is similar, also with 125W anode dissipation. It uses a graphite anode and is, Svetlana claim, one of the lowest

distortion tubes ever made. That triodes like this are now being made specifically for audio use shows just how the tube amp market is growing world wide, and what it will support. Since a low distortion active device like this costs £100s whilst that in a solid-state amp costs barely one pound, you can guess which is real hi-fi.

As always, it's worth noting just one or two key points here. A suitable transformer will be expensive to build and vast in size and weight, especially for Single-Ended working. In my experience most valve amps fail conspicuously in this crucial area, limiting the potential of such esoteric valves. Also, a few kVs will likely exist at switch on and off, between primary and the secondary to which the speakers are connected. I have heard of breakdown occurring. So perhaps it is best to best to use inexpensive loudspeakers! Mordaunt Short's excellent 914s are probably the best low price floorstander you can buy able to complement a tube amp. Have fun - but keep your distance!
NK

DAB-LING WITH DEATH

With the popularity of portable mp3 players and DAB, there is a knock-on effect on the future of sound quality in new recordings, or even re-mastering of existing recordings. What occurred to me is that as the audio standards used for internet download and DAB appear to be inferior even to CD audio why, in future, would music publishers bother to have high standard recording studios if a significant proportion of purchase is via this new market? If a 128kbps stream is sufficient for mass listening and purchase, there may not be a need for 48 track sophistication in a studio.

I appreciate this may mostly be a

problem for the pop and rock formats rather than classical and jazz but, nevertheless, if the big labels get attached to online sales and downloads, how long will it take for them to realise that the need for superb quality is redundant. Maybe I am just too cynical, but it seems a genuine concern, if not a reality at this time. Let us not forget too, that if these standards do become dominant, the need for quality playback equipment is also jeopardised. Why spend thousands of pounds on a system to playback an mp3 file?

Paul Clewlow.

It is a worry. Luckily, artists, studios and producers all care about sound quality too and would be unlikely, en masse, to junk all they'd ever held dear. As technology moves on quality becomes cheaper too; and DVD has shown quality sells. The BBC's decision to sacrifice the quality so carefully built into the VHF/FM network for the incredibly shaky and technologically archaic compression of Musicam on DAB is a shock. DAB I suspect will prove to be a technological dead-end, another failed Euro initiative, like HD-MAC. People are not fooled by it; just read some of the astute observations made about DAB on www.radioandtelly.co.uk to see what a critical pasting this system is getting even from non-hi-fi buffs. As the bandwidth of delivery systems increases and digital transmission schemes rationalise into acceptable formats - Musicam and mp2 not being one of them - I believe quality will rise. We seem to be in the early stages of digital where no one quite seems to know which end is up. The options are enormous, and confusion widespread. Slowly, I suspect, quality levels will rise.

NK



audio and DAB – we're all doomed, I tell you, doomed!

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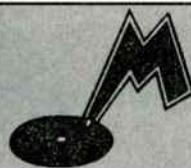


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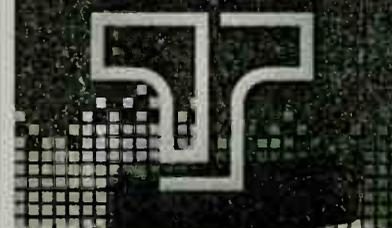


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Rel Strata 3 Sub Woofer (ex-demo) £760
Revel F30 Loudspeakers Ex Demo were £2995 now £2395
Acoustic Research 338 Stand Mount Speakers £275
Eltax Floor Standing Liberty 5+ Speakers £140

PRE AMPS
Audio Research SP14 Pre-Amp £1495
Naim Nac 92 Pre Amp £350
Exposure 11 & 12 Pre Amp & Power Supply £650
Proceed PAV Pre Amp £1395
Adcom GTP 450 Tuner/Pre-Amp £350

AMPLIFIERS
Krell KST 100 Amp £1495
Meridian 605 Mono Blocks £895
Incardeck DIRK Integrated Amp £40

Advantage Integrated Amp £1495
Accuphase E307 Integrated Amp (as new) £2995
Mark Levinson 20.5 Ref Mono Blocks, immaculate condition & boxed £3495
Michell Alecto Amplifier £695
Mark Levinson 383 Int Amp £3495
Musical Fidelity P180 Power Amps With MF3a Pre Amp & Psu £695

CD PLAYERS & TRANSPORT
CEC DX51 MK2 DAC with CEC TL51 Transport NEW £1495
Mark Levinson Reference CD System ML30.6 & ML31.5
Transport (ex demo, full warrantee) £17995
Roksan Atessa CD Transport with ROC DA1 and ROK DS4 PSU £895
Accuphase DP55V CD Player (as new) £2095

MISCELLANEOUS
Audio Note AN-S2 Moving coil cartridge Step-up transformer, copper wired (new) (retails £499) £450
Michelle IsoHera Phono Stage £295

AKG K340 Electrostatic Headphones £50
Transparent Music Wave + 3m Speaker Cable £250
Project Phono Box SE (as new) (retails £125) £90
Stax 40/40 Headphones (as new) (retails £1195) £850
Shunyata Anes interconnects 2m RCA (ex demo) (retails £1275) 775
Shunyata Anes 1m RCA (ex demo) (retails £850) £495
Kondo digital 1m RCA (as new) (retails £1200) £495
Yamaha DVD Player S795 £145
Yamaha Ct-810 Am/Fm Tuner £125

TURNTABLES, CARTRIDGES & TONEARMS
Dynavektor DV20X (as new) (retails £395) £285
RS Laboratory RS-A1 with rotary headshell (as new) (retails £850) £595
ZYX RS20-02H (0.48mv) (as new, Retail £450) £325
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PERPETUAL TECHNOLOGY/MODWRIGHT SIG-2 MONOLITHIC PSU	BRAND NEW	£495
THETA CARMAN CD/DVD TRANSPORT RARELY ON THE MARKET.	MINT/BOXED	£1695
THETA PEARL TRANSPORT	MINT/BOXED	£795
THORENS TCD PLAYER/TRANSPORT	MINT	£495
MARANTZ CDA-94 TRAN.AT&T	EXCLT	£575
PRIMARE V-25 DVD (£1000)	EX DISPLAY/BOXED	£695
THETA PRE GEN III DAC & PRE AMP	EXCLT/BOXED	£1495
THETA DS PRO BASIC-11 DAC	MINT/BOXED	£995
MICROMEGA SOLO TOPLOADING CD/TRANSPORT	MINT	£1295
MICROMEGA CO-3 TOPLOADING TRANSPORT/DOO-PRO COMBO	MINT/BOXED	£1250
CEC TL-51/DX-51 MK111 TRANS.&OAC(£3000)	3 MONTHS OLD	£1995
TECHNICS Z-1000/X1000 TRANS/DAC(GOLD)	BOXED	£1995
WADIA DM X-32 DAC	MINT	£495
MONRIO 18B DAC/PSU	EXCLT	£375

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GOLDEN TUBE SE-1 MKII REMOTE EL-34 INTEGRATED LAST ONE	MINT/BOXED	£795
UNISON RESEARCH MYSTERY ONE PRE AMP	MINT/BOXED	£2595
UNISON RESEARCH 845 MONOBLOCKS	LOVELY!	£2250
AUDION SILVER KNIGHT 300B MONO'S & MATCHING 2-BOX PRE (ALL GOLD) REVALUED	EXCLT	£2995
JADIS JPS-2 TWO BOX PRE (WAS £8000)	EXCLT	£2995
JADIS OEFY-7 100 WATTS CHANNEL	MINT/BOXED	£995
AUDIO RESEARCH SP-9 MKII	EXCLT	£1495
AUDIO RESEARCH D-115 POWER AMP	MINT/BOXED	TBA
AUDIO RESEARCH LS-2B BALANCED PRE AMP	MINT	TBA
AUDIO RESEARCH V-70 BALANCED POWER AMP	BRAND NEW/BOXED	£2500
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MARK LEVINSON NO.23 POWER AMP	MINT/BOXED	£2495
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SNELL C MK-IV AMERICAN OAK VERY RARE/GODD	REDUCED	£1350
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CASTLE AVON FLOORSTANDERS	OFFERS	
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CELESTION DITTON 25'S	VGC	£175
ACOUSTIC ENERGY ASW FB-110 SUBWOOFER	AS NEW	£350
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VAN DEN HUL REVELATION HYBRID 2 METRE PAIR TERMINATED VDH. SPADES		£495
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AUDIO NOTE AN-L 2 METRE BI-WIRE TERMINATED		£175
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Unison Research Unico Line [hybrid, integrated, 80 watts NEW]	£900
Copland CSA14 hybrid valve/transistor	£675
Black Cat Electronics Type 46 Valve MONO bloc's[Lowthers/Tannoy]	£1775
Black Cat Electronics Type 45 Valve MONO bloc's[Lowthers/Tannoy]	£1750
Black Cat Electronics PK4 Valve MONO bloc's[Lowthers/Tannoy]	£1850
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Leak Stereo 20, valve, good rebuilt condition with stereo pre EL84	£425
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Rogers HG88 [ECL86's]	£225
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QUAD 77 integrated	£375
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QUAD 44/306 pre/power	£400
QUAD 44 pre-amp	£275
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Arcam Alpha 8 amp	£215
Marantz PM6010OSE integrated	£175
Meridian 201 pre	£345
Meridian 605 power monobloc[Boxed]	£875
Onix OA22 intergrated	£175
Musical Fidelity B1	£125
Sansui C77/B77 Pre/Power	£175
Sugden C51/P51	£225

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Lowther dual position Acoustas PM7A's	£775-00
Lowther Acoustas PM6A's	£425-00
QUAD ESL 57's black, one owner, as new!! original packing boxes	£850
Tannoy Canterbury's 12" silvers, beautiful	£3500
Tannoy Canterbury's 12" reds nice,	£2500
Tannoy Lancasters 15" GOLDS very nice	£1250
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Snell speakers K's	£325
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Wharfedale Airdales very nice original condition, a seriously under-rated speaker	£525
Leak Sandwich good condition	£120
Rogers BBC LS3/5A's teak finish very good clean condition	£650
Chartwell BBC LS3/5A's beautiful	£650
Rogers LS3/5A's black ash original boxes	£650
CELESTION VF302 Loudspeakers Cost £650	£475
Monitor Audio Monitor 3 Speakers (Top Tweeter Model)	£2900
TDL ELECTRONICS, RTL3 FLOORSTANDING SPEAKERS	£375
Epos ES 11	£275
Epos M15's floor standers	£385
BOSE 141[new]	£150
Rogers LS1 Bookshelf speakers	£125
Tangent TM1 [Kef units, 8" and T27 treble, nice condition]	£185
Kef Coda 9 Speakers	£175
Tannoy 12" dual concentric PA speakers [£1300 new]	£425
JR150's [uses LS3/5A drivers, cylindrical aluminium cabinets]	£375
Acoustic Research floor standers, two 8" bass/mids soft dome tweeter	£225
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RUARK PRELUDE II's [near mint, boxed]	£425
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Dalesford D speaker (like Rogers JR140) fine condition	£175-00
Videoton Minimax 2 hi/boc speakers [like GOODMANS MAXIMS]	£85-00
DECCA CORNER SPEAKERS,	£225-00
proac tablette 2, 2 way speakers black finish	£275-00

CD PLAYERS	
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SHANLING CDT100 VALVE cd player [new]	£1650
Unison Research Unico CD [NEW]	£1195
Audio Analogue Paganini CD [NEW]	£895
Audio Analogue Maestro CD [NEW]	£1700
Sonic Frontiers Anthem CD1 [as new and boxed £1850]	£950
Marantz CD6000 OSE	£155
Marantz CD5000 [brand new and boxed]	£125
MYRAD CD10	£215
MYRAD CD20	£295
Pioneer reference CD PD91	£395
Cyrus[CD] daD 1.5 silver	£225
Micromega stage 2 CD	£225
Nagaoka CD NG7700[LINN]	£195
DFA PDM1 Series 2 DAC	£135

OTHER EQUIPMENT	
Graham Slee phono stage ERA GOLD	£460
Graham Slee phono stage GRAM AMP 2SE	£195
Graham Slee phono stage GRAM AMP 2	£125
JBL 2405 tweeters	£500
QUAD FM3 £100 QUAD FM4	£250
VITAVOX S2's compression drivers	£600
Vitavox S3's [Various 4 cell horns]	£350
Nakamichi BX2[cassette deck]	£115
AUDIO Alchemy-dac in a box	£85
AVI Pre 200 series	£225
Tandberg 3002 Pre Amp	£175

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THORENS TD125-SME ARM-SHURE V15 £325 THORENS TD166 MKII £125
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Technodec £575 MICHELL Techno Arm 'A' £399 ORIGIN LIVE AURORA £970 ORIGIN LIVE
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Magnat Vector 55 floorstanders, black	99
Marantz 5cd changer	50
Creek A50i	350
JM Lab Cobalt 810, black	125
Living Voice Avator	2295
Revolver R33, superb value speakers	350
Exposure 2010 cd	495
Exposure 2010 integrated	495
Exposure 2010 power	399
Denon 260L tuner	35
DPA Enlightenment pre	250
Acoustic Energy Aesprit 300, maple	150
Project Debut 2 Phono SB	160
Neat Mystique, cherry	250
Creek cd53	795
Resolution Audio Opus system	3795
Exposure 21 pre	450
Exposure Super 18 power	395
Linn Classic Movie	1250
Linn 5.1 speaker package	950

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Dynamics

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	Sale	List		Sale	List
NEW THIS MONTH					
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SPE 20R TURNTABLE WITH SFE 7 ARM S/N	£1,995	£4,843	AUDIO SYNTHESIS DAC, DAC UPGRADE/AVAILABLE	8.95	2200
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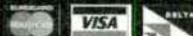


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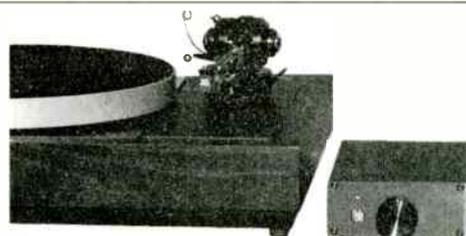
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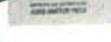
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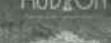
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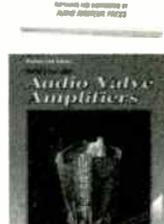
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 This book covers construction projects for preamplifiers, power amplifiers and two amplifiers for musical instruments aimed at the practical audio/hi-fi enthusiast, it offers much information on the operation of electron tubes, while the first chapter gives a short history of the thermionic valve.
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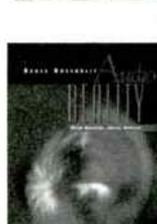


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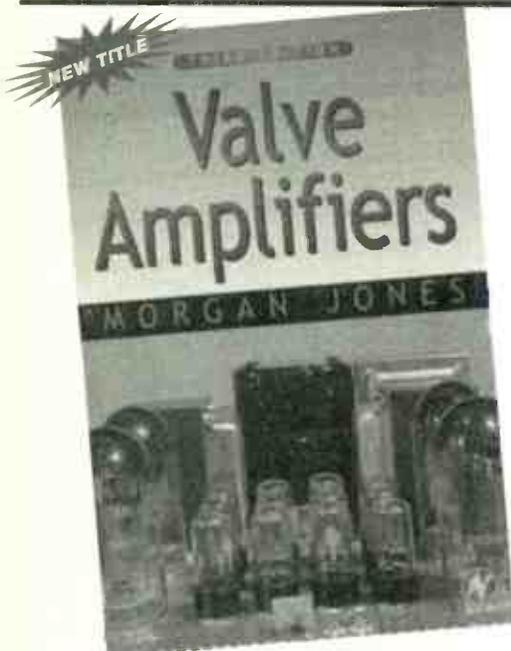
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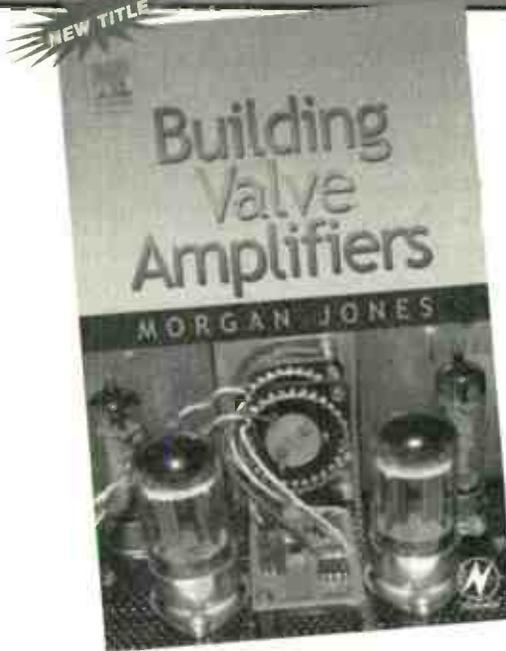
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LOWTHER ACOUSTA, VGC pre 1970. Also pair Lowther PM6 drives, boxed, one with detached cone. Belonged late father, need to clear. Can split. Enquiries or offers to iloveday@nucleus.co.uk (Jan)

FOR SALE: Marantz CD94KI/DAC94KI £1000, Audiolab 8000M (black) £400, Audiolab 8000C (grey) £150, Creek CD50 £150, Creek DAC50 £100, ALR Note 3 stand mount speakers with tunable ABRs £450. Naim HiCap Olive just serviced £450, NAC72 Olive £300, Linn LP12 Valhalla £450, Linn Lingo £500, Zeta Arm £250. Tel: 020 8642 6516 before 9pm, no offers. (Feb)

SUGDEN A21a (2001) £500. Marantz CD6000SE £160. Both mint. NAD tuner 402, offers. Tel: 01482 444 765 or Email: peequoo@waitrose.com (E.Yorks) (Jan)

JVC AX-SD1 Integrated Amplifier. Five star review in October 2004 edition of Hi-Fi World. Brand new, boxed and sealed. Suggested price £1995. Absolute bargain at £1125. Tel: 01273 307696 or 0794 9392607. (Jan)

WADIA 860 CD player. 14 months old. Mint condition. £5000 o.n.o. Lavardin IS Reference amplifier. 14 months old. Mint condition. £1800 o.n.o. Sonus Faber Auditor Speakers with original stands. 14 months old. Mint condition. £1800 o.n.o. Tel: David 086 387 2087 Rep. of Ireland (Jan)

ROGERS LS7 loudspeakers, rosewood with Sound Organisation stands. Superb sound, can demo. No offers, £200. Upgrading. Tel: Bill 01268 561 108 (Basilston) (Jan)

WANTED: HACKER or Dynatron combination unit or music centre with radio and Garrard record deck. With or without loudspeakers. Tel: 01843 843 145 (Jan)

LECSON AC1 API amplifier, serviced, excellent £550. Quad amps, unmolested sound, fantastic £600. Pioneer TX9500 tuner, mint, handbook, £250. Primare 928 preamp, remote, fabulous, rare, £1400. Tel: 01226 710 605 or 0781 889 1892 (Yorkshire) (Jan)

ELECTROCOMPANET ECI-3 integrated amplifier, mint condition, remote control, £650 ono. Denon DRM800A cassette deck, very good condition, three head, £100. Target AER3 rack £60. Offers invited. Tel: Barrie 0161 747 1293 or 0161 707 7007 (Jan)

SONY ESPRIT amp TA-N901 and matching pre-amp needs attention £200. Mod Squad line drive passive pre-amp £50. Garrard 401 and SME 3900II arm £200. Revox pre-amplifier B252. Tel: 07904 958 128 (Jan)

BANG AND OLUFSEN Beogram 330 separates system: receiver, CD, cassette, turntable (new stylus needed). Classic 80's hi-end. Family owned from new. Superb looks. Good condition. £225. Tel: 01332 517 588 (Jan)

ORIGIN LIVE standard kit turntable, separate power supply £150. Origin Live silver tonearm £300. Creek 4130 integrated amplifier SE MM phono stage £200. Wilmslow Audio Gemini speakers £150. Tel: 01443 422 796 (Jan)

MONITOR AUDIO Studio II speakers, black, excellent condition. Especially made for jazz musician professional writer. Original price £750, would sell for £300 or nearest offer. Size 10"x8"x6" Tel: 01273 453 994 (Shoreham-by-Sea) (Jan/1)

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KLIPSCH HERESY2 loudspeakers, black, with Linn Isobarik stands £599, Arcam Xeta I £99, Linn Sekrit loudspeakers grey/black with white Linn Brakits £199. Tel: 07903 571787 or E-mail j.maxsmith@btopenworld.com (Jan)

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AVANTEGARDE UNO Horn speakers, 6 months old, colour red, perfect condition, £3000. Kimber Kable Monocle-XL 2.4 metre pair, £350. Tel: 020 8531 5979 (Feb)

MCINTOSH CD (American Hi-End). Musical Fidelity F22 pre amp (valve), F15 power amp valve input, (superb sound), Ruark Equinox speakers, own stands, Linn LP12 with Naim Aro arm wired with Russ Andrews cable, Ortofon Rohmann cartridge, bi-wired speakers van den Hul Revelation speaker cable terminated with WBT Banana Plugs (sixteen), all mains Russ Andrews high power leads, Atacama Stands Two. Reason for sale - my hearing and now age!! Reluctant sale, £6000, no offers. CD player cost nearly £4000. Tel: 01424 431 536 (Hastings) (Jan)

NAIM SNAXO 3/6 active cross over unit £250. Can dem. Tel: 0121 553 1121 (Midlands) (Jan)

HEGEL H2 top of the range power amp 150 wpc £950 (£2,500). American Acoustic Developments 3-way, slim, floor standing speakers £225 (£599). Tel: 01202 767 873 (Dorset) (Jan)

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AVI PRO Nine loudspeakers, cherry, boxed. Excellent condition £395. AVI S2000 monoblocks and preamp (including MM/MC phono input) excellent condition, boxed £975. Hi-Fi News 1991-2004 with binders - offers. Tel: 01942 891 741 (Jan)

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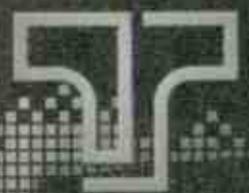
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DENON AVC-AISE, black, boxed, mint condition, £750. Tel: 01603 458 944 (Jan)

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KEF THX Speakers, white, left, right, centre, £200 each. Dipoles £350 pair. Tel: 01603 458 944 (Jan)

VELODYNE F-1800R11 ultimate 18" subwoofer, remote, £900, no offers. Pioneer DV09 THX DVD player £600. Tel: 01603 458 944 (Jan)

CYRUS FM7.5 tuner, purchased February 2002. Genuine, hardly used mint condition with box and manual, £250 ono. Tel: 01332 559 626 (Jan)

TUNER SONY SA 3ES as new £95. Speakers Rogers LS2A/2 100 watt black good condition £125. Linn turntable case and lid only offers. Tel: Tony 020 8743 5690 (West London) (Jan)

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KEF REFERENCE 104/2 Speakers, rosewood, good condition, buyer collects, £375. Tel: 020 8657 7141 (Evening 6-10pm) (Jan)

MERIDIAN 502 and 557 pre and power amplifier combination with factory fitted moving coil phono stage. Absolutely mint condition, complete with boxes and manuals, £1900 ono. Tel: 01463 811 779 (Jan)

FOR SALE Due to house move, LivingVoice Auditorium, boxed, instructions, cherry veneer, vgc, much loved, £900 ono. Buyer collects, Woking area. Tel: Dave 01483 728 657 (Jan)

LEAK SANDWICH loudspeakers, cabinets perfect, teak wood finish, original classics still performing well. Warranty/installations instructions included. Offers accepted. Tel: 020 8690 1939 (London) (Jan)

QUAD ESL63 pair (teak) one excellent condition, one non-working. £450 ono. Tel: 020 7932 0108 (Evenings) (Feb)

SOUND AUDIO VP3A valve line preamp. ALPS, Wonder-Caps etc. Superb sound, rare, £550. Leak Troughline Stereo II, good condition, £85. Rogers HG88II, good condition, £165. Tel: 07976 904 381 (Jan)

SONDEK AFROMOSIA Trampoliner Cirkus fitted with exclusive LVIII Ittok K18, Stored for 6 years, original packing and original chassis kit in boxes, excellent condition £700. also Naim 32.5 with MM/MC cards £100. Tel: 01382 552 072 (Jan)

THE ULTIMATE Subwoofer! EWW motional feedback design, flat to 15Hz, £499. One only so hurry!. Easily interfaced with any system. Tel: 01243 537 312 after 6pm please. (Happy Xmas Les) (Jan)

WANTED: MARANTZ CD 6000 KI Signature. Black made in Japan, fully functioning, excellent condition, will pay reasonable price. Tel: 07974 274 615 (Jan)

NAIM CDI immaculate condition, can dem, £520 ono. Tel: 0115 925 6736 (Jan)

ELECTROHOME MARQUEE 9501Acon projector. HD-GT17 lens. Extras include: modules for HDTV, image shifter, RGBHV video; Extron 109xi VGA-UXGA interface. Outstanding performance excellent condition. Original packing etc. Offers invited. Tel: 01945 463 077 (Jan)

FAROUDJA VP400AU Quadrupler (960p). Latest calibration. Improves CRT projector video display 1,000%; brightness 125%. Extends tube life threefold. As new condition with original packing etc. Offers invited. Tel: 01945 463 077 (Jan)

MUSICAL FIDELITY XA200 monobloc amplifiers, mint £475 inc. UK delivery. Musical Fidelity XAS100 stereo power amp, mint £275 inc. UK delivery. Tel: Mark 07754976443 (Jan)

LINN LP12, Valhalla, Ittok LVII, £595. Pro-Ac Tablette 50 speakers £395. Cyrus Straightline amp £250. DAD3 CD £350. Yamaha KX-10 tape £120. Stands Unique support with vinyl £90. Pro-Ject Phono-Box £20. Cable-Talk interconnects with components. Target speaker stands £40. Entire system £1600. Move to N.Y. forces sale. Tel: Ian 01903 209 295 evenings or Email: icicic@btopenworld.com (Jan)

WANTED: MARANTZ SX72 signal conditioner. For Sale: Nakamichi 600 tape deck, near mint, boxed £85. Ferrograph 702 high speed, g.w.o. £55. Tel: 01759 305 582 (York) (Jan)

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private ads

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ROCK TURNTABLE Rega RB300 £500. Rotel RCD 991AE £350. Revox B760 tuner £400. Cyrus DAD3Q £300. Spondor BCI speakers with stands £275. Nakamichi cassette deck £150. Tel: 020 7813 3179 or 07973 459 614 (Jan)

1X QUAD II amp 1x Quad 22 control unit 1x Quad FM tuner 1x Wharfedale Bronze model speaker all in beautiful Hardwood caseing. Also 1x Quad II amp 2x G.E.C KT Valves 1x G.E.C 83 1x G232 All original all boxed with instruction manuals all in excellent condition. Contact Soren at sozzanelli@yahoo.co.uk or call 07730 557152 (Jan)

TANNOY D100 biwireable standmounters from the Definition range. Immaculate rosewood veneer. Cost £699, as new, asking £320. Can email pictures if needed. Will include Linn Index stands. Tel: Craig 01642 816516 (Jan)

MONITOR AUDIO Gold Reference 20, little use, quick sale required, 3 months old, as new, £1150. Tel: 07967 196873 (Jan)

ARCAM FMJ DV27A DVD-Audio Player: 10 months old, under warranty plus 5 year extended Arcam warranty; BLACK finish, mint, boxed, Progressive scan, top CD playback too, £1395 (£1900) Tel: 07808 771 394 (Jan)

BITS CLEAR Out: 4 off 4.5 meter Audioquest type 4 speaker cable (bi wiring/bi amp-ing), fitted with high quality gold plugs. £50. Yamaha sub woofer. Powerful detailed sound for home cinema. Immaculate condition. Boxed £150. 4.5-metre pair of these high quality speaker cables. Factory-terminated with Kimber Ultraplate banana plus at each end. About two years old. Very detailed and open sound. £130. High quality HI-Fi stand cost £400, 5 glass shelves. Chrome legs., includes marble plinth and cable management system (cost me an extra £150!!!). Speedy sale required hence low price of £150. Offers considered on the above. Tel: 07720 807013 (Jan)

AUDIOLAB 8000Q preamplifier for sale with box and manual £500 ono. Tel: 01642 559 078 (Stockton) (Jan)

AUDIO RESEARCH power amplifier 100.2 mint and boxed £1750 (£3790 new). Audio Synthesis Dax Decade balanced and single ended, mint and boxed £1525 ono (£4000 new). Denon DVD A1 gold, mint and boxed £1200 ono (£2500 new). Nordost Optic component cable, 6 metres £300 (£600 new). Siltech Golden Ridge digital cable £300 (£450 new) Titanium Pulsar Points and Granite plinth £130. Tel: 07970 858 948 (Jan)

PAIR MARK Levinson 436 MonoBloc Power Amplifiers. £6250.00. Price includes 2.0m Bi-wire JPS Labs Superconductor FX Speaker Cables. 18 Months Old. Transferable Warranty, Cartons, Manuals, Gloves. Collection/Delivery negotiable Tel: 01709 532839 (Feb/I)

AUDIO SYNTHESIS DAX Discrete DAC. Custom order Black Gate capacitor, balanced version with variable output digital volume control. Incredible resolution, 4 months old, £3750 (£6500 new). Tel: 07989 234290. (Shropshire) (Jan/I)

ROGERS STUDIO 7 speakers, Rosewood, £50. Partington Ultima Dreadnought stands £100. Quad 77 power amplifier £260. Audiolab 8000C pre-amp £175. Monarchy Audio 18B delux DAC £90. All excellent condition, boxed, instructions. Tel. Tony 01256 770044 (Hampshire). (Jan)

LOWTHER ACOUSTA, VGC pre 1970. Also pair Lowther PM6 drives, boxed, one with detached cone. Belonged late father, need to clear. Can split. Enquiries or offers to iloveday@nucleus.co.uk (Jan)

FOR SALE: Marantz CD94K1/DAC94K1 £1000, Audiolab 8000M (black) £400, Audiolab 8000C (grey) £150, Creek CD50 £150, Creek DAC50 £100, ALR Note 3 stand mount speakers with tunable ABRs £450. Naim HiCap Olive just serviced £450, NAC72 Olive £300, Linn LP12 Valhalla £450, Linn Lingo £500, Zeta Arm £250. Tel: 020 8642 6516 before 9pm, no offers. (Feb)

SOUNDSTYLE X105 equipment stands, black £175, silver £200. Two of each available. Tel: 01603 458 944 (Jan)

MERRY CHRISTMAS AND A HAPPY NEW YEAR TO ALL OUR ADVERTISERS AND READERS

GUIDELINES FOR BUYING AND SELLING SECOND-HAND EQUIPMENT

FOR THE BUYER

1. Not everyone is honest - Buyer Beware!
2. **Don't send cash!**
3. Accept no verbal guarantees.
4. Have you heard the item or something similar? If not, why do you want it?
5. Don't pretend to have knowledge - it's your fingers that will get burnt!
6. Is it working? If not, why not?
7. Has it been modified and, if so, have notes been kept?
8. Was it any good in the first place?
9. **Don't send cash!**
10. If you are in the slightest doubt, arrange an audition (see point 5). If it's too far, wait for another time.
11. Either buy it or don't: vendors are excusably impatient with 'consultation' exercises.
12. **Don't send cash!**

FOR THE SELLER

1. Not everyone is honest - Seller Beware!
2. Make no verbal guarantees.
3. Even 'nearly new' is still second-hand. If the manufacturer's guarantee is no longer in force, your price should reflect this.
4. There is very little intrinsic value in second-hand hi-fi; it's only worth what some one will pay for it.
5. The best guide to pricing is last month's Classifieds: that a 'classic' was worth £xxx a year or two ago is no guide. Values fall as well as rise.
6. Amateur second-hand dealing is not a big money game: you win some, you lose some.
7. Be prompt with despatch. If in doubt about buyer's bona-fides, either wash out the deal or send C.O.D.
8. There will always be time-wasters; be tolerant within reason!

Hi-Fi World writers have extensive audio industry experience - from designing the best valve amplifiers, engineering bespoke pro audio installations and mastering digital discs to classic and modern hi-fi retailing. No other magazine has such a diverse wealth of editorial talent. No other magazine is able to combine the new and the old, the classic and the modern, the affordable and the expensive, the raw and the cooked, with such authority:

DAVID PRICE

A passion for music from an early age got DP hooked on hi-fi. His writing career began in 1990 with *New Musical Express*, and after writing for *Hi-Fi World* he joined the Doors team at *The Sunday Times*, and now edits the Home Entertainment section of *The Month* alongside this magazine. A compulsive record collector, vinyl is David's favourite tippie, and he's crazy about classic audio too - as his encyclopaedic knowledge of Japanese high end attests.



NOEL KEYWOOD

A leading technical journalist, his rigorous reviewing - informed by empirical measurements - has made an indelible impression on the UK hi-fi scene. After editing *Hi-Fi Answers* in the 1970s and contributing to *The Flat Response* and *Hi-Fi Review* in the 1980s, Noel went on to launch *Hi-Fi World* in 1990. His challenging approach has famously seen him expose digital audio's technical failings, and champion the cause of his beloved valve amplifiers and high sensitivity loudspeakers.



DOMINIC TODD

Working in hi-fi retailing since 1991 - at all levels including sales, management, purchasing, training and marketing - has given DT a forensic knowledge of modern audio and video equipment. Living at the 'coal-face' makes him brilliantly placed to comment on what kit works best and why, and to explain the politics behind it.



HADEN BOARDMAN

His knowledge of classic kit is almost unmatched - doubtless helped by him getting bitten by the hi-fi bug at the tender age of 9! Haden's tastes are very much of the 'valves and vinyl' ilk, his system displaying a welter of British names from the 1960s to go with his 1980s Marantz CD spinner. He's also a keen kit builder, and is not afraid to wield a soldering iron in the noble cause of superior sound.



PATRICK CLEASBY

After a stellar career in IT, Patrick's love of music drew him to the field of multichannel music mastering, which is now his vocation. His exhaustive knowledge of digital audio and surround sound theory and practice makes him perfectly placed to assess the latest DVD-Audio and SACD hardware and software alike.



STEWART WENNEN

A professional audio engineer since the 1970s, SW is still constantly amazed by the poor quality of kit that some manufacturers foist upon the buying public - but is also delighted when he finds a bargain. His redoubtable experience of designing and building his own turntables, electronics and loudspeakers through the years makes him an ideal *Hi-Fi World* scribe, along with his obsession with music.



LJK SETRIGHT

A man whose reputation precedes him, LJKS has had a long and brilliantly distinguished writing career. Most famous for his quarter century of contributions to *CAR* magazine, he has also had over one hundred books published. A gifted, classically trained musician, his passion for hi-fi comes from an enduring love of music. A keen Radio 3 listener, LJKS's Linn Sondek turntable comes second only to his beloved Kremlinn tuner in his affections.



WHAT IS HI-FI WORLD?

An independent hi-fi magazine of fourteen years standing, founded by Noel Keywood - one of the UK's leading technical hi-fi writers.

WHY IS HI-FI WORLD SPECIAL?

Almost all hi-fi and home entertainment magazines are owned by large media corporations that publish anything that makes money, be it caravan, computer or mobile phone titles. But we're different! As the only magazine published by Audio Publishing Ltd., a small independent specialist publisher, hi-fi isn't just a business for us, it's a way of life.

WHAT IS HI-FI WORLD'S PHILOSOPHY?

We are the only real world audiophile magazine you can buy. No matter whether something costs 20p or £20,000, we'll tell you if it's worth having - and why. Being independent, we can write what we like, and we do. If it's recommended in these pages, it's because we've lived with it - and rate it. If we don't, then we'll not gloss over the fact for reasons of commercial gain.

We don't print reviews of bad equipment - what's the point? So everything inside these pages is interesting or excellent, and usually both. Yet still we don't pretend everything is fantastic. Not even the best equipment is right for everyone - which is why we go to great lengths to explain the respective strengths and weaknesses of each bit of kit. We don't knock stuff, we say why it will work in some systems and why it won't in others - so you can make your own mind up.

Unlike some titles, we don't delude ourselves that we're the ultimate authority on everything, but the huge experience of our team ensures that we're invariably pretty close to the mark. Importantly, we back our subjective findings with technical measurements - which ensures that everything we review is a representative sample, and that we know what ancillaries are best.

We don't pretend that every new product is better than its predecessor. We're happy to recommend classic hi-fi when it's better than modern stuff. This doesn't help our advertising revenues, but it gets you closer to getting a superb sounding system for the lowest possible price.

WHAT'S THE HI-FI WORLD SOUND?

Go into your local high street electronics emporium, and you'll hear no end of cheap, forward, hard and showy sound bits of audio kit. As we listen to music hour after hour every day, we're not into this. We go for hi-fi - at any price - that has the ability to communicate what the musicians are trying to say. This means it must be rhythmically engaging and dynamically expressive - but must also be able to recreate a believable soundstage and a wide and varied range of tonal colours. We don't like a hard sound, nor do we enjoy the soft. It's got to be open and organic. Interestingly, there is kit at all price levels that offers this quality - although it often takes some finding. So we're happy to recommend anything from an old, long-discontinued £30 amplifier to a brand new pair of £6,000 loudspeakers - if they sound right!

trade ads

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THE MISSING LINK for Very Special Cables. Designed & Hand Built in England by Music Lovers for Music Lovers. "First in the Field" with a Full Range of 5n Pure Silver Cryogenically treated Litz Loudspeaker Cables and Interconnects ...'The Link Family' where every Cable is individually created using the finest Silver from tip to tip...A Limited number of these Cables - as featured at the Heathrow Hi Fi Show - are now available for home demonstration by arrangement...Visit www.the-missing-link.net for details or contact jan@the-missing-link.net or Mark at 0115 8779089. (Jan)

PURE EARTH and dedicated mains (electrical) circuits design and installation service. Contact MainsDoctor 07989 200 961, Email: mainsdoctor@yahoo.co.uk Website: www.mainsdoctor.co.uk We install for all audio and video applications (Feb05/1)

VINTAGE WIRELESS COMPANY LONDON Website: www.vintagewirelesslondon.co.uk Buy-Sell-Exchange. Vintage wireless and classical audio. Repairs, spares, restoration, modification to all valve equipment. Quad II, Leaks etc, shipped worldwide, best prices, call us at 17 Bell Street, London, NW1 5BY. Tel: 020 7258 3448 Fax 020 7258 3449 Email: vwirelesslondon@aol.com (Jan)

E.M.A.S. REVOX C221 £550, B710 II £500, B760 £550, PR99 £650, Studer A80RC £750, B67 £350, A807 £500, A810 £750, A710 £550, A725 £400, Fostex D20B £300, Uher 4200 £300. Tel: 01246 275 479 (Jan)

NAIM. BUY, Sell, Cash, P/xchange. Systems, part systems, amps, preamps, CD, tuners, power supplies, speakers, Sondeks, Isobarics, Mana etc. Tel: 01382 819 732 (Jan/1)

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KOOLKABLES.COM We only sell pure silver cables! Prices start from £30. Try our Christmas treat 'Insight Silver Bullet' Edition fully cryogenically treated from £55. Refund if unsatisfied! Full details www.koolkables.com (Jan/1)

HIGH POWER & Deep Sound - high current, tough silver plated mains & loudspeaker cables designed & manufactured to enhance audio systems performance. For advice and information phone John on 01840 213797, North Cornwall. www.johnthorpeaudio.co.uk (Jan)

AMAZING CABLES! Solid silver interconnects from £110, with air/teflon insulation and WBT plugs. Silver speaker and mains cables from £250. Fantastic performance, refund guarantee. Tel: 0115 982 5772 after 7pm, or Email: bob@skydivers.co.uk (Jun)

AUDIOPUBLIC, 78 Otley Road, Headingley, Leeds, 0113 217 7294. Yorkshire's newest Hi-Fi retailer, stockists of Naim Audio, Rega Research, Conrad Johnson, Sugden, Dynavector, (cartridges and amplifiers) and many more. Please call for advice. (Jan)

HIGHLAND AUDIO, Kirkhill, Invermess, 01463 831 658. Exclusive distributors of AVI audio products. Ecosse Reference Cables - all mono & supermono crystal cable 20% off otherwise 15%. Complete system available for demonstration. Trade-Ins welcome. Email: highlandaudio@aol.com (Feb/1)

WANTED: USED Hi-Fi 1970s to present day. Particularly interested in classic gear from the 1970s. Pick up anywhere in the North East or North Yorkshire. Tel: 07769 702 861 or Email: buying@classichifi.info (Jan)

NAKAMICH TAPE Decks. Dragon, mint with original boxes and owners manual copy of service manual included £1050. RX505 unidirectional mint with original manual copy of service manual included £800. LX5, 3 head £300. RX202 £275. TDK MA-XG90 ceramic tapes call for availability they are to limited supply. Quality interconnects ordered to length. Unique Solid Stainless Steel and glass equipment stands made and designed to order. Call for details: 01843 599980 (Jan)

DRAGONFLY AUDIO. Beautiful handmade surrounds for the Thorens 'TD150' & 'TD160' turntables in various finishes, other accessories such as matching hardwood isolation cones. For details. Tel: 07904 008274. E-mail: Audiotools68@aol.com (Feb)

AUDIOFILE OBJECTIVE for New, XDisplay and Preowned Hi-Fi. Musical Fidelity, Roksan, Neat, Myryad, Project, VHD, QED, Marantz. Other makes preowned. 16 Allen House, The Maltings, Sawbridgeworth, Herts. 01279 724 024 Hi-Fi Purchased. Free Parking (Jan)

www.hippo-hifi.co.uk (Jan)

WANTED- DAMAGED or non-functioning rack-mounted professional solid-state amplifiers. Any condition whatsoever. Also 'unrepairable non-functioning Class-A solid-state power amplifiers, eg., Krells, Spectrals, Passlabs etc. Phone Nick Sheldon 07968 264 520 or 01603 662 438 or Email: nick_sheldon@yahoo.com (Jan)

GRAHAM TONEARMS, Whest Audio, Graham Slee, Denon, Shure, Michell, Transfiguration, Clearaudio, Stax, Sumiko, Hadcock, Harbeth and many more. Sale prices from Ian Harrison. Tel: 01283 702 875, 9am-9pm including Sundays. (Feb)

NAIM CDS1 and CDSPS fully serviced at Naim 2003 - £1300. CD5 perfect condition - £750. SL2 Speakers ex-demo perfect condition - Euros 6000.00. All items boxed, service manuals, remote controls, 6 Months Guarantee. AINM-AV - NAIM DISTRIBUTOR FOR IRELAND & NORTHERN IRELAND. 1, Church Road, Swords, Dublin. Tel: + 00 353 (0) 1 813 7937 M: + 00 353 (0) 87 247 0559 Email: peter.williams@ainmav.com www.ainmav.com (Jan)

BRILLIANCE'S RANGE of custom-made Teflon insulated cables now includes Eminent interconnects and speaker cables delivering exceptional performance at bargain prices. Demonstration cables available. Contact Mike on 07963 117 341 or see www.brilliancehifi.co.uk (Jan)

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The most important and expensive components of a valve amplifier are valves and transformers. £200 or £500 for a pair of huge "push pull" output transformers produces good bass + lots of "inter leaved" windings for better high frequency and "stability". Huge £150 mains transformers gives a less "processed" sound. Selected "matched" set of valves cost £50 or £160. If we could achieve the same quality of sound with £10 volume control, £10 wires, £10 capacitor, we could have saved a lot of money !!!

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£500 EL34 valve amplifiers (40 watts + 40 watts) to most £700 amplifiers.

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KT88 valves are more expensive than 6550 valve

American 5670 valves

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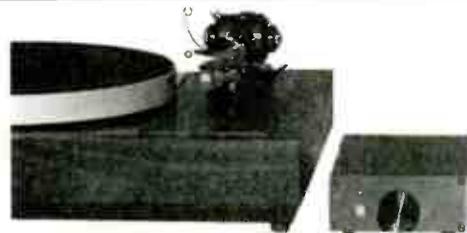
Structural modification awarded 5 star rating by



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- High conductivity phono plugs £20
- Slotted arm tube - £85

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Imogen Holst conducts Gustav Holst

What is it about viola-players that makes them such excellent music analysts? The supreme example must be that virtuoso player (and composer) Paul Hindemith, whose analytical ability made him the most intelligible conductor before whom I have ever performed. His economy of movement made Pierre Boulez seem extravagant and hyperactive: when he judged things to be going right, he simply stood stock-still on the podium – but if he moved so much as a finger, it clearly meant something.

Another to make his meaning clear was Bernard Shore, long ago first viola in the BBC Symphony Orchestra. In one of his books (*Ten Symphonies*, perhaps 60 years ago) he gives a wonderful account of Holst's *Planets* – despite that work being officially a suite rather than a symphony *stricto sensu*. It is one of the greatest musical works of all time, and I have at least four versions, variously on LP or CD, including that most authoritative old Boult performance – but I am not going to recommend any of them, because I do not believe that any hi-fi system can do it justice. Near the end, the magnificently wrought score directs the organist to underpin the orchestra with a 16Hz bottom C, but so quietly that it is not heard. What you feel is a strangely beating draught: it is the air in the Albert Hall faintly pulsating. What mere hi-fi could reproduce this?

Elsewhere in *The Planets* Holst demonstrates his masterly ability not only to make large forces make small noise, but also small numbers to sound loud. Above all is his phenomenal skill in constructing music, and for this no large forces

Imogen Holst CONDUCTS Gustav Holst

Lyrta
Two Songs without Words
A Fugal Concerto
Golden Goose - Ballet Music
Nocturne
Double Concerto
Lyric Movement
Brook Green Suite
Capriccio



William Bennett • Peter Graeme
 Cecil Aronowitz • Emanuel Hurwitz
 Kenneth Sillito
ENGLISH CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

are needed, nor extravagant hi-fi. Any half-decent stereo system should be able to recreate the fretted intricacy, the jewelled counterpoint, the utter musicality and the sheer wit in his *Fugal Concerto* for flute, oboe, and strings. Dating from 1923, it is his Opus 40 No.2, and if you acquire the 1992 Lyrta CD on which his daughter Imogen conducts the English Chamber Orchestra you may share the intense joy that I always experience on hearing it.

I must admit that I adore the fugue form. A good fugue (the one from Rheinberger's *Schwanda the Bagpiper*, for instance, at its best on two pianos rather than orchestra) can make me laugh out loud, and this Holst work can be at least as much fun, at the same time summoning a respect amounting to awe at the sheer cleverness of the musical construction. It is all so fleeting and evanescent – the whole thing, three movements in all, takes only 484 seconds – that playing it over and over again is not only desirable but possibly necessary, so that more of those intricate felicities can be brought out of hiding. Here is a thing of beauty that is truly a joy forever.

The soloists on this Lyrta SRCD.223 (Imogen Holst conducts Gustav Holst) are fully up to the

mark. My flautist friends in 1958 were full of praise for this new young student William Bennett, who nine years later (when the original recording was made for LP) now played the Holst with beautiful phrasing. Oboist Peter Graeme is no less lyrical, and when he picks up the second subject in the third movement and runs with it, his sense of fun is obvious.

That second subject, introduced at the point where Holst creates a double fugue, is actually the tune of the 17th-century folk song *If all the world were paper*. You probably know it, but may not know (Holst probably did not) that the basis of the words comes from a liturgical poem composed some time before 1096 CE and still sung as a solo once a year in most synagogues. Being a solo, it cannot take the form of a double fugue – but the words take the form of a double acrostic, which is almost as entertaining.

The deliciously witty and perfectly crafted miniature which is *A Fugal Concerto* by Holst cannot have a whole CD to itself. There are numerous other tracks, all interesting, some really clever, but this is the jewel in the jewel-box. Listen to the sparkle, and laugh!
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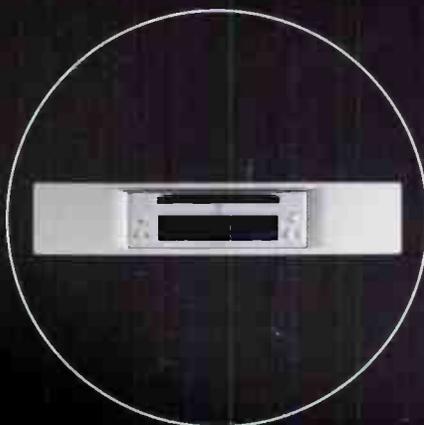


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